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Fiona Aldridge (R8078138)

Learning Journeys:

**Exploring the wider benefits of participation in adult
and community learning**

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)

December 2009

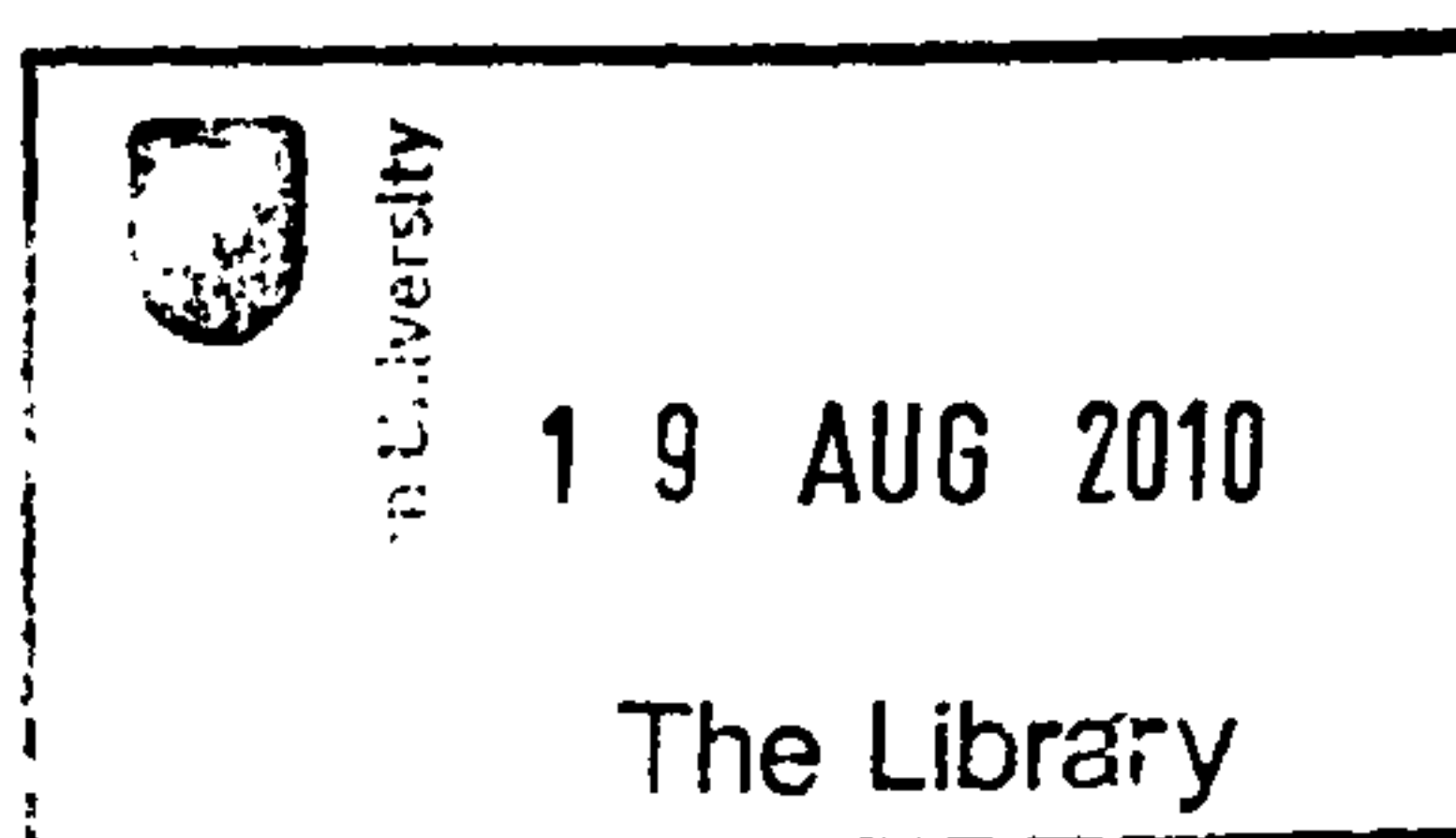
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1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to identify the wider benefits of participating in adult and community learning, as perceived by learners, and to explore the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits.

For the purpose of this study, wider benefits are considered to be private non-market benefits (McMahon, 1998), that is those individual level benefits that are not measured directly in terms of additional income or increased productivity, and participation in learning is defined as being enrolled on a programme of adult and community learning provision.

Based on an ongoing review of the literature and successive waves of data collection, my research questions were:

1. What are the some of the potential wider benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision?
2. How do these benefits emerge and develop over time?
3. What do learners believe are the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits?

My interest in this research topic arose out of my professional role at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), where I am currently employed as a Development Officer in the research team. This role involves working on a wide range of research and development projects, managing NIACEs quantitative research programme, and using research to support advocacy and policy development.

Shortly after I joined the organisation, the Government published its Green Paper, *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998), with its eloquent foreword by David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

'As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the

neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature.' (DfEE, 1998: 7)

The Green Paper was widely welcomed for its shift away solely from the 'narrowly focused educational goals of enhanced productivity, which dominated the education policy agenda for most of the 1980s and 1990s, to a wider set of more important, but less tangible benefits' (Feinstein et al., 2003: 4). However, although colleagues, from both within and outside the Institute, based on their own experiences of working with adult learners, were fully convinced of the existence and value of the wider contribution of learning, a paucity of research evidence existed to corroborate this (Bynner, 2001).

In order to begin to address this evidence gap, the Department for Education and Employment established a Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, in the following year, to produce and apply models for measuring and analysing the contribution that learning makes to wider goals. As my study was intended to complement, rather than duplicate, work taking place within the Research Centre, I maintained regular contact with the Centre throughout the study's lifetime: taking advice from colleagues; participating in their workshops; drawing on their literature; and working with a number of models and frameworks that have been developed.

My own interest in this broad area of research lay particularly around the wider benefits of participation in adult and community learning provision. As part of the 1944 Education Act, Local Education Authorities were given a statutory duty to secure adequate provision for the further education of adults, although since this time adult education has been consistently described as a discretionary service and therefore an easy target for cuts when budgets become tight. As part of the 2001 Learning and Skills Act, funding for this provision was transferred to the Learning and Skills Council, with a guarantee of minimum funding for LEAs until 2002-03 (LSC, 2002). Among others, NIACE expressed concern (Tuckett, 2003) that the end of this guarantee might see a shift of public funding away from the

provision of adult and community learning towards more vocationally orientated provision, and encouraged the sector to develop an evidence base from which continued funding could be advocated.

Chapter 2 provides an account of the policy context against which this study is set, charting its development from the publication of *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) to the most recent policy initiatives of 2008, exploring the changing purposes and principles underpinning publicly funded adult education opportunities. It outlines how NIACE's concerns have since become realised, such that between 2004/05 and 2006/07 Learning and Skills Council data shows a 42 per cent decline in enrolments on publicly funded 'safeguarded' adult learning provision – a total of over 184,000 fewer adult learners on programmes leading to personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development – as part of an overall loss of 1.4 million adult learners within publicly funded provision (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008).

In examining these issues, my initial thoughts were to undertake a quantitative study in an attempt to see whether it would be possible to place a monetary value on the benefits of adult and community learning provision and thereby provide an economic case for continued investment. However, my reading of both the substantive (see chapter 3) and methodological literature (see chapter 4), alongside discussions with other researchers working in the field, guided me towards the adoption of a qualitative approach, and the use of a series of semi-structured interviews with learners, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of adult learners and the social phenomena involved in the production of the benefits of learning (Silverman, 2000; Silverman, 2001).

The study was based within a city centre adult education college through which the Local Authority delivered the majority of its adult and community learning provision. Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with adult learners on a range of provision. Initial interviews were undertaken with fourteen learners, nine of whom participated in a second interview six months later, and four of whom also participated in a

third interview a further twelve months on. A detailed discussion of the methods adopted within this study can be found in chapter 5.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore the data around three broad areas of learning benefit that I have chosen to focus on during this study: assessment and accreditation, working lives, and supporting and stimulating transition. Each chapter provides an overview of the learners from whom the data is taken, before going on to look at the complexities of each area of benefit, how benefits emerge and develop over time, and at the mediating factors involved in their production.

The final chapter of this thesis, chapter 9, seeks to bring together each of the preceding chapters by exploring the relationship between the literature reviewed and the data collected as part of this study. The chapter begins by reflecting on the three broad categories of benefit in which I have chosen to focus during this study, before going on to address each of the research questions in turn. The chapter concludes by considering a number of methodological reflections and areas for future research that might be undertaken to build on the work of this study.

2. Policy Context

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, public policy and funding for adult education mainly concentrated on the provision of opportunities to serve a narrowly focussed economic agenda (Clyne, 2006). Against this background, the vision outlined in the Government consultation paper, *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) appeared to herald a broadening of focus and recognition of the wider contribution that learning can make to the lives of individuals, families and communities.

‘As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature.’ (DfEE, 1998: 7)

Whilst liberal adult educators had long espoused these values, they had not featured within national education policy for several decades. Towards the beginning of the 20th century, educational opportunities for adults were seen as having a social purpose as well as being able to satisfy the needs of individuals. Asserting its role in strengthening civil society, enhancing social justice and in creating informed citizens, the 1919 Report of the Adult Education Committee (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919/1980) described adult education as being:

“Inextricably interwoven with the whole of the organized life of the community.... It aims at satisfying the needs of the individual and at the attainment of new standards of citizenship and a better social order.” (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919/1980, paragraph 330)

The Russell Report, published over fifty years later, also echoed these sentiments in expressing the value of adult education as:

“Not solely to be measured by direct increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other material yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large.”

(DES, 1973, paragraph 6, General Statement)

Yet despite the all-inclusive view of adult education expressed by both of these reports, successive governments throughout the late twentieth century failed to adopt these principles in the development of their policies and programmes, and in the funding of adult education opportunities (Clyne, 2006)

This chapter provides an account of the policy context against which this study is based, charting its development from the publication of *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) to the most recent policy initiatives of 2008. In particular, the chapter explores the changing purposes and principles underpinning publicly funded adult education opportunities, and its implications for provision and participation.

The Learning Age

In 1997 the New Labour Government came to power on the basis of a manifesto that positioned education as its number one priority (The Labour Party, 1997). Almost immediately after the general election, the government established a National Advisory Group on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, comprised of leading policy makers, advocates and practitioners to advise the Secretary of State on matters concerning adult learning. One of their initial tasks was to advise government on what was to become its Green Paper, *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998).

Although the main body of this consultation paper demonstrated considerable continuity with the policies of the previous conservative government, the preface, written by David Blunkett, the new Secretary of State, outlined a new vision for adult education policy in Britain. While it would remain important to invest in learning to achieve stable and

sustainable growth through the creation of a well-educated, well equipped and adaptable labour force (DfEE, 1998), it was also acknowledged that adult learning had a wider contribution to make to the lives of individuals, families and neighbourhoods, and that the state had a role to play in securing access for all, for a range of purposes.

In working towards this new vision, the first term of the labour government saw the introduction of an impressive range of new measures including the provision of individual learning accounts to stimulate individual demand for learning, the establishment of the University for Industry to provide online learning for people at work and for those seeking to study at below university levels, investment in an Adult and Community Learning Fund to widen participation in learning through the development of innovative adult learning projects, and investment in a parallel Union Learning Fund, as well as the creation and financing of Union Learning Representatives as workplace champions for learning.

Alongside this raft of policy measures, the government also showed greater interest in evidence-based policymaking, increasing its investment in educational research, establishing a National Educational Research Forum and creating a series of research centres to examine specific areas of policy related knowledge. The first of these centres, the Research Centre on the Wider Benefits of Learning, was established in 1999 with a brief to produce and apply models for measuring and analysing the contribution that learning makes to wider goals including, but not limited to, social cohesion, active citizenship, active ageing and improved health; to devise and apply improved methods for measuring the value and contribution of forms of learning including, but not limited to, community based adult learning where the outcomes are not necessarily standard ones such as qualifications; and to develop an overall framework to evaluate the impact of the lifelong learning strategy being put in place to 2002 and beyond to realize the vision set out in *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) covering both economic and non-economic outcomes.

As well as representing a commitment to the development of evidence based policy; investment in the Centre was politically significant in two key ways. Firstly it was the first educational research centre to be funded directly by the Department, reflecting the position of education as the government's top manifesto priority. Secondly, it demonstrated recognition of the wider goal of education in enhancing social well-being and cohesion alongside its main role of promoting economic performance. (Schuller et al, 2004: 7)

The next decade: lifelong learning to employability, skills and work

In the decade since the publication of *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) education policy has been driven by two interlinked objectives: firstly to strengthen economic competitiveness through raising levels of skill and qualification, and secondly to address social exclusion. Adopting the perspective that the most effective way of overcoming social exclusion is through raising levels of employment, the government initially sought to reduce unemployment through a work-first strategy. In recent years however, this strategy has led to concerns around low skills and sustainable employment, focussing greater attention on training and skills (NIACE, 2008). As a result, opportunities to learn for purposes other than for the development of skills have become increasingly marginalised within national policy.

One of the key elements of the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE, 1999) that followed on from *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) was the proposal to establish a new body, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), charged with the planning and funding of all post-compulsory learning outside of higher education. Although there was some initial disquiet (NIACE, 1999) about the impact of the transfer of funding for adult education away from local government (DfEE, 2000), much of this was allayed by the Secretary of States' first remit letter to the LSC (Blunkett, 2000) which balanced a concern with the economic dimension of the skills agenda with a sensitivity to the role of learning in delivering wider benefits.

“I look to the Council to increase the demand for learning by adults, and to increase the supply of flexible, high quality opportunities to meet their needs. This is central to our goal of a learning society – a society in which everyone can share in the benefits of learning... It is important that, at the start of the 21st century, all adults continue to develop their competence for the labour market, and reinforce their ability to be active family members and citizens.” (Blunkett, 2000: 12)

Disquiet regarding the impact of the transfer of funding for adult education from local government to the LSC (DfEE, 2000) was based on concerns that the end of the guarantee of minimum funding for Local Education Authorities in 2002/03 (DfEE, 2000) would result in a shift of public funding away from the provision of adult and community learning towards more vocationally orientated provision. To guard against this, colleagues at NIACE called for the development of an evidence base from which continued funding could be advocated, and this research study was, in part, designed as a response to this call.

In 2003, the Government’s first skills White Paper, *21st Century Skills: realising our potential* (DfEE, 2003) was published, with the explicit aim of strengthening the UK’s position as one of the world’s leading economies by ensuring that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled (DfEE, 2003: 11). In 2005, a further White Paper, *Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work* (DfES, 2005), built on the 2003 White Paper with proposals to place employer’s needs at the centre of the design and delivery of training. Thus as the data collection for this study began in 2005, policy in relation to adult education had already begun the shift from a broad definition of lifelong learning to a much stronger focus on learning for employability and skills (NIACE, 2008). While the 2005 White Paper acknowledged that for many people, learning can also be a great source of pleasure and interest, and agreed to reserve a budget of £210m per annum for the work (DfES, 2005), this was no more than had been spent by

Local Authorities on such provision, and was not subsequently adjusted for inflation, thus representing a real terms reduction in expenditure on such provision.

In 2006, a further two policy documents focussed on skills were published by the government. The first, *Further Education: raising skills, improving life chances* (DfES, 2006a) placed an economic mission at the heart of the FE sector's role by defining its central purpose as being to equip young people and adults with the skills, competencies and qualifications that employers want, and to prepare them for productive and rewarding employment (DfES, 2006a: 6) This White Paper also set a new entitlement to free training for young people up to the age of 25 to achieve a level 3 qualification and established Train to Gain to help employers improve their employee's skills with subsidised training for basic skills and individuals studying for their first full level 2 qualification.

The second key document, *Prosperity for all in the global economy: world class skills* (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006), provided an account of the UK's current skills landscape, highlighting the relatively low level of skills in the UK workforce, as demonstrated by formal qualifications, and recommended increased investment and focus on economically valuable skills in order to secure the competitiveness of the UK economy. Leitch argued that the UK's skills base is considerably weaker than its competitors and is likely to deteriorate further without significant policy change. In 2007, under a new prime minister, the government published a further White Paper in response to Leitch, *World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (DIUS, 2007), proposing a skills revolution to close skills gaps at every level by 2020. Inevitably, within limited budgets, this specific policy focus on young people and on vocational and accredited provision, risked the marginalisation of more general adult education opportunities within the minds of both policymakers and providers.

Since 2006, a number of policy and structural changes to the adult education system have continued to take us further down this skills route. For example, the 2008 consultation document, *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver* (DCSF/DIUS, 2008) announced plans to replace the Learning and Skills Council by 2010 with a Young People's Learning Agency, looking after provision for 16-18 year olds and a Skills Funding Agency responsible for the funding of post-19 provision outside of higher education. The language used here appears to suggest a position whereby it is considered that young people should be offered a wide range of opportunities to learn, while adults require opportunities to develop their skills. If this is realised, then opportunities for adults to learn for purposes other than for skills development risks being further marginalised within these new structures.

An analysis of the numerous consultation, review and policy papers published in the decade since *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) reveals a number of key issues within public policy in relation to adult education that are relevant to my study. Firstly, since the late 1990s there has been an unprecedented level of intervention by central government in this area of public policy. Secondly, policy has been increasingly influenced by a perception that the competitiveness of the UK economy is being constrained by the low skill levels within the adult population, as measured by formal qualifications (NIACE, 2008). As a result, public funds have become increasingly focussed on the provision of accredited and vocational provision for adults, with other adult provision being marginalised as a consequence. Thirdly, there has been a move towards a demand-led system for post-school education and training, with particular emphasis on the requirement for providers to be responsiveness to the needs of employers without a similar emphasis being placed on responsiveness to the needs of individual learners. Fourthly, a separation has existed within policy between learning for work and learning for pleasure or personal development, with little recognition of the permeability between these boundaries. Finally, a lack of a visible strong link between non-vocational, non-accredited programmes and the government's economic and social objectives has resulted in a frequent redefinition of the purposes and status of this work

(NIACE, 2008). As a result, these policy trends have led to a narrowing of publicly funded provision for adults, accompanied by a significant decline in learner numbers, especially within non-vocational unaccredited provision.

Amongst this dominant policy focus on initiatives in relation to skills development, both within the policies of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS, 2007; DCSF/DIUS 2008) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DIUS/DWP, 2007; DWP, 2007; DWP/DIUS, 2008), 2008 saw the publication of a consultation document on adult learning for personal fulfilment and not necessarily linked to accreditation or employment. This paper, *Informal Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead* (DIUS, 2008a), is the first government paper since *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) published a decade previously, to focus on informal and non-formal learning opportunities for adults. The paper argues that an emphasis on adult vocational education within policy should not be interpreted as a disregard for the value of informal adult education, and instead calls for stakeholders to help shape a new vision for informal learning for adults, supported with resources from across the public, private and voluntary sectors (DIUS, 2008a: 3). While publicly funded opportunities may be reducing, the paper argues that outside of this provision, there has been an explosion of informal adult learning activity, much of which is delivered through voluntary organisations, and supported by millions of unpaid volunteers (DIUS, 2008a: 11). It will be of interest to see, from responses to the consultation, the value that stakeholders place on the *public* provision of such opportunities as a means of supporting and widening access to learning for all adults, or whether it is considered sufficient that provision exists for those with sufficient resource and interest to participate in learning.

The impact on provision and participation

The publication, in November 2008, of the most recent grant letter setting out the priorities and budget for the Learning and Skills Council, clearly illustrates the policy shift, as described above, from one of a broad focus on lifelong learning to a more narrow one of employability, skills and work. The 2009-10 LSC grant letter addresses the provision of learning

opportunities for adults under the heading of ‘adult skills’, and directs the Council to direct funding at those who need it most, “while at the same time increasing flexibility so that providers are able to offer what is needed to support employers and help individuals back into sustainable employment.” (Denham and Balls, 2008: 6) No mention is made of the wider or non-economic benefits of learning, except with regards to the government’s citizenship agenda and its goals for community cohesion.

As the focus of government policy in relation to adult learning has changed, so too has the publicly funded provision on offer. As part of its drive to widen participation in learning, the Learning and Skills Council initially oversaw an expansion of non-vocational, non-accredited provision delivered by public and voluntary agencies. Since 2004 however, a policy focus on skills and the development of a market led model for adult education has meant that although some funding is available for courses outside of policy priorities, this has been reduced dramatically with an expectation that the shortfall is made up through raising fee income. Many providers have responded with a combination of raising fees and reducing provision, resulting in a significant decline in enrolments.

Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 Learning and Skills Council data has shown a 42 per cent decline in enrolments on publicly funded ‘safeguarded’ adult learning provision: a total of over 184,000 fewer adult learners on programmes leading to personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development – as part of an overall loss of 1.4 million adult learners within publicly funded provision (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008). While ministers maintain that funding has been directed towards courses which provide adults with the best chances of employability and further progression, those subjects which have experienced the largest decline in enrolments between 2004/05 and 2006/07 include health, public services and care courses (down 447,000), information and communication technologies courses (down 394,000) and preparation for life and work courses (down 248,000) (CALL, 2008).

The context of this study

The study was based in a city centre adult education college through which, at the time the study commenced, the Local Authority directly delivered the majority of its adult and community learning provision.

The college offered a wide range of daytime, evening and weekend provision including: European, community, oriental and classical languages; sign language and interpreting; basic skills and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages); writing schools for creative writing, criticism and journalism; computing and information technology; pre-GCSE, GCSE and work skills; visual arts; pottery, textiles, jewellery and crafts; dance, drama, history, music and beauty; and teacher training. The length of courses varied from those that ran for a small number of sessions to those that ran for the full year (up to 30 sessions). In addition to a wide range of one-off sessions, a large proportion of the college's provision ran for 10 weeks per term, over either 1 or 2 terms. Courses varied in levels from pre-entry to level 3, and while many courses provided the opportunity of gaining a qualification, this was not the case for all courses, nor did all learners on accredited courses choose to work towards an available qualification.

While full fees were charged for some courses, LSC funded provision was offered free of charge to those on means tested benefits. For other courses, the City Local Education Authority provided a 90 per cent concession on means tested benefits and a 75 per cent concession on a range of non-means tested benefits, while learners residing in the county were provided with a concession to a maximum of £1.50 per hour course fee. In addition, the college also provided, from its own funds, a 30 per cent concession for all unwaged adults over 60 and full time students over 18. Charges for materials and accreditation costs were additional to fees charged, although learner support funds were available for learners on low incomes or in particular financial difficulty. Most courses required a minimum of 12 enrolments in order to be financially viable.

Since 2004, faced with a government expectation that providers will recover a greater proportion of the cost of provision through fee income, combined

with a strong national policy focus on the role of education in meeting the needs of the economy, the Local Authority in which the adult education college is based has chosen to refocus its provision in line with the skills agenda. As a result, the range and volume of non-accredited provision has fallen considerably and fees have risen.

Summarising conclusions

This chapter has provided an account of the policy context over the decade since the publication of *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998). The volume, pace and direction of policy change over recent years, and its subsequent impact on the provision of, and levels of participation in, adult and community learning opportunities, has ensured that my study has remained of considerable policy interest and relevance since its conception. When first commenced, I anticipated that any evidence would contribute towards the defence of existing levels of provision as well as potentially support the case for making increased investment. As the study draws to an end, adult and community-learning provision faces very different challenges with over 1.4 million fewer adults participating in such provision, and many groups representing staff, students and local communities recognising a need to come together in a Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning to campaign for protection of the rights of all to access learning opportunities.

One of the main ways in which the changing policy context has impacted upon my study is in relation to the categories of benefits on which I have chosen to focus. In particular, my decision to focus on the categories of assessment and accreditation and working lives was made in order to allow me to explore whether investment in general adult education opportunities is able to contribute towards government's key policy objectives and, if so, to increase the visibility of such links.

Of perhaps greatest personal interest has been the opportunity to observe, from my analysis of the data, how policy, set at a national level, works out in the lives of individual learners. While my analysis of the data provided examples of where policy intervention has served to support government objectives, there are also many more examples of where such policy has

delivered unintentional and sometimes undesired consequences. One such example has been the withdrawal of many of the courses on which the learners involved in my study were originally involved. As a result, some learners have enrolled on alternative provision at the college, some have moved away from publicly funded provision into private provision, while others are no longer engaged in any formal learning activity.

3. The literature: identifying and analysing the benefits of learning

One of the key differences between adult learning and schooling is that while children are expected to spend time learning, it is for adults, usually a matter of choice which has to be fitted into often complex lives, competing with other demands on time such as work, family commitments and other interests (Sargant and Aldridge, 2003: 72). Understanding the benefits that adults can experience as a result of choosing to participate in learning, therefore, is of key importance to policy makers and practitioners working in this field, as well as to adult learners themselves.

Despite this importance, until recently, there has been relatively little research into the outcomes or benefits of learning for adults, with many researchers instead focussing on issues of motivation (Houle, 1961; Sheffield, 1962; Boshier, 1971; Burgess, 1971; Beder and Valentine, 1987; Tamkin and Hillage, 1997; Campaign for Learning, 1998; McGivney, 1990; Sargant, 2000) and participation (McGivney, 1993; Beinart and Smith, 1998; La Valle and Blake, 2001; Skaalvik and Finbak, 2001; Sargant and Aldridge, 2003). There are a number of both pragmatic and political reasons why this should be the case. Schuller (2003: 24) attributes it to an assumption among policy makers and practitioners that the outcomes of participation are positive and self-evident, as well as to the relative ease in which data on participation can be accessed.

The more established field of research most closely associated with my study is that of returns to education, where much of the literature focuses upon the individual level benefits of education in terms of improved employability, productivity and income (Shultz, 1961; Becker, 1964; Blundell et al., 1996; Bonjour et al., 2002; Jenkins et al., 2002). However, most researchers would agree that the total benefits of education extend far beyond this, and “there is now an awareness that the links between personal, social and economic well-being and education need to be understood better and communicated to policy makers and the wider public” (Desjardins and Schuller, 2006: 18).

Despite not being the predominant focus of my study, it is important that any study on adult learning should take account of why adults choose to participate in learning (Boshier, 1971). Houle (1961), a pioneer of research into adult motivation to learn identified three categories based on an individual's orientation towards learning: the goal orientated learner, who learns to fulfil conscious objectives; the learning orientated learner, who seeks knowledge for its own sake; and the activity-orientated learner, who participates for reasons unconnected to purpose or content of the learning. While Houle has his critics, (Cookson, 1987) subsequent research (Sheffield, 1962; Boshier, 1971; Beder and Valentine, 1987; McGivney, 1993), has demonstrated that adults participate in learning for a wide and complex range of reasons that, while they can be clustered into a limited number of groups (Burgess, 1971) cannot be reduced to a single motivation.

Knowles work on andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980: 43) also has relevance to my study. In differentiating between how children and adults learn, Knowles (1978; 1979) argues that as a person matures, they are more likely to be self directed in their learning; draw on their own experiences as a resource in learning; be more ready to learn about phenomena that they regard as relevant and problematic to them; and are less likely to be subject-centred and more likely to be problem centred in their orientation towards learning. While andragogy has become a frequently expressed ideology among adult educators, emphasising the place of the self in the learning process (Day and Baskett, 1982), the concept has also been challenged by many (Griffin, 1983; Hartree, 1984; Tennant, 1986; Pratt, 1988). One of the key criticisms, of particular relevance to my study is that issues of curriculum control and power are overlooked within the theory, and that "in the context of subject areas increasingly pre-packaged in numbers of credits, pre-determined levels of achievement and final certificates, the possibility of exercising completely autonomous self direction, is in many ways, severely curtailed" (Hanson, 1996: 100).

This chapter presents a review of the literature around the identification and analysis of the benefits of learning. Firstly it examines the arguments for undertaking research to identify the benefits of learning, before going on to

outline two key frameworks of analysis and their underpinning theories of human and social capital. The chapter also provides a critical overview of a number of existing studies into the benefits of adult learning, before moving on to demonstrate the paucity of research that examines the mediating factors involved in the production of benefits. Finally, this chapter examines the literature around the three themes that I have chosen to focus on within my data analysis: assessment and accreditation, working lives and supporting and stimulating transition. A review of the methodological literature relevant to this study is included in chapter 4.

The case for identifying the benefits of learning

The case for investing in research to identify the benefits of learning is primarily based upon the argument that the development of a greater understanding of the full range of benefits should enable policy makers to make more effective decisions with regards to the allocation of finite resources (McMahon, 1998; Feinstein et al., 2003), while also supporting improvements in individuals' decision making (McMahon, 1998).

While a general awareness exists that externalities and non-monetary private benefits are important, McMahon (1998: 309) argues that in order to make rational decisions about investment in their own lifelong learning, individuals need to have more specific information about the array of benefits arising from learning. He argues that while individuals take some account of non-market returns of education when making decisions, it is doubtful whether they are aware of the full scope of the marginal product of education in contributing to quality of life, broader economic development and society's overall well-being. Thus "if governments were to undertake improvements in the measurement, cost-based valuation and dissemination of this information, this intervention would be justifiable on efficiency grounds since rational decision making by individuals would be improved" (McMahon, 1998: 317). Similarly, society also needs this information to inform decisions concerning the portion of lifelong learning costs that should be publicly financed, and as it seeks to find the most cost effective ways of achieving broader economic development and other policy goals. Finally, McMahon (1998) argues that an examination of the benefits of

learning is a worthy focus for research as there is a need to build on what is known to develop increasingly comprehensive measures of the total market and non-market returns to education. Although it has proved to be extremely difficult to put an exact value on the non-market returns to education, the non-market benefits of schooling have been estimated to contribute around fifty per cent of total benefits (Haverman and Wolfe, 1984; Wolfe and Zuvekas, 1997). Similar estimates of the benefits of participation in adult education are not yet available, although we might assume that they too may be sizeable.

Research into the wider benefits of learning can also offer policy makers across a number of government departments' an evidence base from which to formulate policy (Feinstein et al., 2003: 4). While those departments primarily concerned with the funding and planning of education stand to gain particular benefit, a range of other government departments, such as those responsible for health and for defence also hold significant budgets for education and training for their staff (IFLL, 2008). A 2002 listing of some of the important information gaps within the Department for Education and Skills included "returns to the less formal types of learning, such as recreational courses undertaken in LEA-secured adult learning [and] wider outcomes such as health benefits and active citizenship" (Leman, 2002: 45). Evidence of positive outcomes can point to the value of investing in particular forms of learning and reveal factors, such as learner characteristics, indicating sub-populations where investment is likely to be most effective. Evidence of any negative outcomes of learning can also be valuable in the development of interventions to address prior characteristics of learners, and conditions in which learning is provided, so that negative experiences can be transformed into positive ones.

My first research question was constructed in response to these arguments to develop a greater understanding of the wider benefits of learning. Although my study is unable to contribute to the quantitative evidence base on the market value of returns to education, the adoption of a qualitative approach in exploring my research questions was designed to explore the *range* of potential benefits that might be experienced as a result of participating in

adult and community learning provision. By raising awareness of some of the potential benefits of learning, this evidence could then be used to inform decision-making with regards to investment and participation in learning opportunities. In a period of contracting public expenditure on general adult education opportunities, where the question of ‘who pays?’ has become increasingly important, this study is also able to illustrate where participating in learning brings benefits to the individual as well as to a range of public policy agendas.

The focus of this study, as outlined in the first research question is upon participation in adult and community learning (ACL) provision. While much narrower than adult learning in general, it is not an easily defined sector. In their literature review of ACL, Callaghan et al. (2001) suggested that the definition should include the following four components, although some elements may not apply to all instances of ACL in practice: ACL is sometimes seen as adult learning provided by Local Education Authorities; ACL is sometimes defined as the learning that happens in certain types of community settings, including adult education centres; ACL is seen as being concerned with targeting populations for widening participation; and the learning content and process of ACL is usually not focussed on job-specific vocational purpose. For the purposes of my study, all but the third component of the definition are relevant to our understanding of adult and community learning provision.

Underpinning theories of human and social capital

The benefits of learning, or as they are more commonly termed in the literature, the returns to education, have been classified in a number of ways by different researchers, with most of these forms of classification or framework based on the principles of human capital theory, with a growing number also utilising the concept of social capital. The following section provides a brief overview of both theories before going on to discuss their value in underpinning research into the benefits of learning.

Human capital theory

Human capital has been traditionally defined as the ability, skill and knowledge of individuals used to produce goods and services, although more recently the concept has been viewed more broadly (Balatti and Falk, 2002). In 2001, the OECD defined human capital as “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being”. (OECD, 2001: 18).

Human capital theory originated with the notion that investment in physical capital might also be paralleled by investment in human capital through education and training (Smith, 1776/1991) and was developed further, in the 1960s when US economists Shulz (1961) and Becker (1964) began to look at the benefits of education and compute rates of return. From this period onwards, policy makers, first in the developing world and then in industrialised countries, adopted the notion that investment in education produces economic growth (Little, 2003). While the economic character of human capital theory was the focus of initial critique by educationalists, criticism today concentrates more on its application to policy analysis, rather than on the theory itself (Schuller et al, 2004).

Although human capital theory has now been widely adopted by researchers seeking to explore the benefits of learning, the theory is not without its critics. Firstly, despite continuing progress in the measurement of returns to education (McMahon, 1997; McMahon, 1999) and in the capacity of human capital analysis, the validity of measurements of human capital in particular remain problematic (OECD, 1998), with questions around the extent to which qualifications or time spent in education capture the qualities that enable adults to improve their performance across varying aspects of their lives. Secondly, while multiple associations exist between investment in human capital and outcomes, large assumptions are often required in moving from association to clear causal relationship (Schuller et al, 2004). Thirdly, criticism is also made of the predominant emphasis of research into the direct economic benefits of education, with research into indirect benefits arguably deserving more attention (Little, 2003).

Each of these critiques has some relevance to my study. Firstly, rather than seeking to identify the benefits associated with a highest level of qualification or of time spent in education, my study is concerned with the benefits of participation in learning. Secondly, in order to avoid making my own assumptions about the relationship between learning and its benefits, I decided to address my research questions by specifically asking learners for their views as to their perception of the benefits that could be attributed to learning and the mediating factors involved. Thirdly, my study seeks to add to the body of knowledge on the benefits of learning in focussing on the identification of a range of non-economic outcomes from participating in learning. Furthermore, it is appropriate that research into the benefits of adult education, in particular, should be underpinned by human capital theory. Firstly, the basic tenet of human capital theory is that people invest in themselves through education (Schultz, 1961). While for schooling, it is generally not the individual, but their parents and the state, who choose to invest in education, the theory perhaps has more applicability to adult education, where the decision to participate is usually made by the learner themselves. Secondly, research into motivations for participating in adult education shows that adults often engage in learning as a result of multiple goals, both economic and non-economic, extrinsic and intrinsic (Houle, 1961, Beder and Valentine, 1987; Sargant and Aldridge, 2003). Here human capital theory fits in well through its principle of maximising utility, whereby adult learners seek to maximise the anticipated pleasures, satisfactions and benefits that can be derived from education. While this could include enhanced employability and increased earnings, a wide range of factors, many of which are not primarily economic, also lie behind an adult's decision to participate.

Social capital theory

While human capital theory links education to economic outcomes, to date there is no widely accepted theory linking education to social outcomes. (Desjardins and Schuller, 2006). In a number of models, however, the concept of social capital is beginning to be incorporated (Schuller et al, 2002), in part because of the “deficiencies of concepts such as human capital to adequately explain the processes and outcomes of learning”.

(Balatti and Falk, 2002: 3) and in recognition that only through social capital “are the skills and knowledge of human capital made available for the benefit of individuals, the communities and regions in which they live, and ultimately the society at large.” (Balatti and Falk, 2002:1). In particular, the relationship between human and social capital is important to education researchers who theorise learning as a social activity (Field and Schuller, 1997)

Social capital is generally considered to refer to the networks and norms that enable people to contribute effectively to common goals (Putnam, 2000), with the concept usually operationalised by reference to either attitudinal measures such as expressed trust and tolerance or behavioural measures such as participation in civic activities (Schuller et al, 2004). Social capital as a concept, however, is much less well developed than that of human capital.

Woolcock (1999) identifies three basic forms of social capital: social bonds, bridges and linkages: with bonding ties generally referring to relations among members of family and ethnic groups; bridging ties referring to relations with distant friends, associates and colleagues; and linking ties referring to relations between different social strata. In relation to my study, with its focus on participation in learning, it is possible to see that strong bonding ties among groups of learners can contribute to the development of a sense of identity and common purpose, while strong bridging and linking ties between learners of different backgrounds and between learners and those who have yet to participate can serve to prevent the pursuit of only narrow interests and the exclusion of non-participants.

A number of problems exist with the use of social capital as a theory: there is yet no agreed definition of social capital; it is difficult to measure; and it is highly context dependent. Despite this however, Schuller (2000) argues that social capital could be useful, both for adult education practitioners and as a policy concept, in a number of ways. Firstly by counterbalancing other concepts and instruments that are too narrow to incorporate the complexities and interrelatedness of the modern world; secondly by countering excessive

individualism through its emphasis on social relationships; thirdly by introducing a longer-term perspective into policy making, fourthly by reintroducing a moral dimension into educational thinking, and finally by opening up new perspectives on longstanding issues.

Adult education has a key role to play in the development or building of social capital (Healy et al., 2001). It is able to foster values that encourage social co-operation as well as provide a meeting place where various social networks can meet, with studies into the wider benefits of participation in adult learning demonstrating its value in building new relationships and in improving or maintaining existing ones (Schuller et al., 2002). Appropriate teaching methods and organisation of learning can also encourage shared learning, team work, openness to new ideas and cultural diversity, thus acting as an important generator of bridging capital across different groups in society. Social capital theory is able to provide a useful conceptual underpinning for exploring all of these benefits and for considering issues of communities of learners, of the ways in which adult learners use their knowledge and skills in the wider networks in which they belong, and of how learning affects areas such as civic engagement and family life (Schuller, 2000). It has also been demonstrated (Balatti and Falk, 2002: 13) that a number of benefits of learning are primarily associated with learners being able to *draw* on social capital, that is acquiring the capacity to access resources not previously available to them, with the processes of building and of drawing on social capital often interconnected.

Frameworks for analysis of the benefits of learning

A search of the literature provides a small number of classifications and frameworks, some of which are based on the theories above that have been used previously to analyse data on the benefits of learning. The following section provides a description and critique of two key frameworks (McMahon, 1998; Schuller et al, 2002), that I considered could usefully be used within my study for the analysis of data on the benefits of learning, before going on to provide an overview of a number of other studies.

McMahon: Conceptual framework for measuring the total social and private benefits of education

The most well known framework for exploring the total impact of education has been developed by the American economist, Walter McMahon, whose latest developments in creating a conceptual framework and economic models to represent outcomes of lifelong learning are presented in his paper on the *Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of the Social Benefits of Lifelong Learning* (McMahon, 1998). This paper brings together a wide range of empirical research providing evidence on the outcomes of learning, distinguishing between monetary returns and non-monetary returns to the individual and externalities, whilst also acknowledging that all three are interrelated and are therefore difficult to separate out.

The framework, based on human capital theory, makes four conceptual distinctions: firstly market measured impacts of education on earnings and economic growth versus non-market impacts that generate private satisfactions and impact social development goals; secondly direct impacts of education versus indirect impacts that operate through another variable; thirdly private benefits to the individual versus externalities, i.e. spill over benefits through the education of individuals to others in the community; and finally static or short term impacts versus longer term dynamic effects (McMahon, 2004). McMahon also incorporates time into his model through the concept of the life cycle, thereby capturing returns over time, as well as assessing the returns to any extension of existing educational provision through the notion of lifelong learning. Although, McMahon's work cites very few examples of studies that focus specifically on adult education, the framework could nonetheless be used to do so.

The use of these four conceptual distinctions, enabled me to develop clarity as to the focus of my study, that is upon the non-market private benefits of education, which empirical evidence (McMahon, 1998) suggests could include health effects, enhancement of children's education, higher returns on financial assets, more efficient household purchasing, higher female labour force participation rates, reduced unemployment rates, more part-time employment after retirement, lifelong adaptation and continued

learning, the enhancement of non-cognitive skills such as leadership, selective mating, and non-monetary job satisfactions. Indeed, analysis of my data revealed a number of these benefits, most notably in relation to health effects, issues around employment status, non-monetary job satisfactions and lifelong adaptation.

In reality however, the distinction between monetary and non-monetary benefits is problematic, as many of the non-monetary benefits listed above could be said to have an economic value. For example, while economic participation rates are not a direct monetary benefit in themselves, the income earned by increased participation does result in an economic benefit both for the individual and wider society. In a similar way, while improved health may or may not be of monetary benefit to the individual, reduced demands on healthcare provision are of economic benefit to society more widely. Indeed McMahon himself suggests that a monetary value can be placed on these non-monetary benefits by assessing how much it would cost to produce the same outcome using alternative means available. Although, I made no attempt within my study to place such a monetary value onto the identified benefits, I have highlighted within my analysis where non-monetary benefits could clearly be said to have an economic value, for example where learners have experienced improved employability, the opening up opportunities for self employment, or improved mental or physical health.

Despite the prominence of McMahon's work and the wealth of research on which his framework is based, a number of factors limited its suitability to be used as an analysis framework within my study. Firstly, the categories identified by McMahon are based on those for which empirical research evidence is available. The qualitative nature of my study meant that it was not always be possible to assess whether the learners interviewed had benefited in some of the above ways, while at the same time, my study captures additional benefits that had not been, nor were able to be, measured empirically and were thus excluded from McMahon's list.

Secondly, when reading McMahon's accounts of the empirical research, it is often unclear as to how learning has been defined and measured. Where details are given, 'learning' usually refers to the number of years spent in initial education or the highest level of qualification gained. In contrast, my study was more concerned with the benefits of participation in a learning activity, rather than in the time taken or qualification gained. The limited description given of each piece of empirical evidence also made it impossible, without making an individual assessment of each of the original studies, to be confident that all of the categories were supported by valid evidence.

Schuller et al.: Triangular conceptualisation of the social benefits of learning

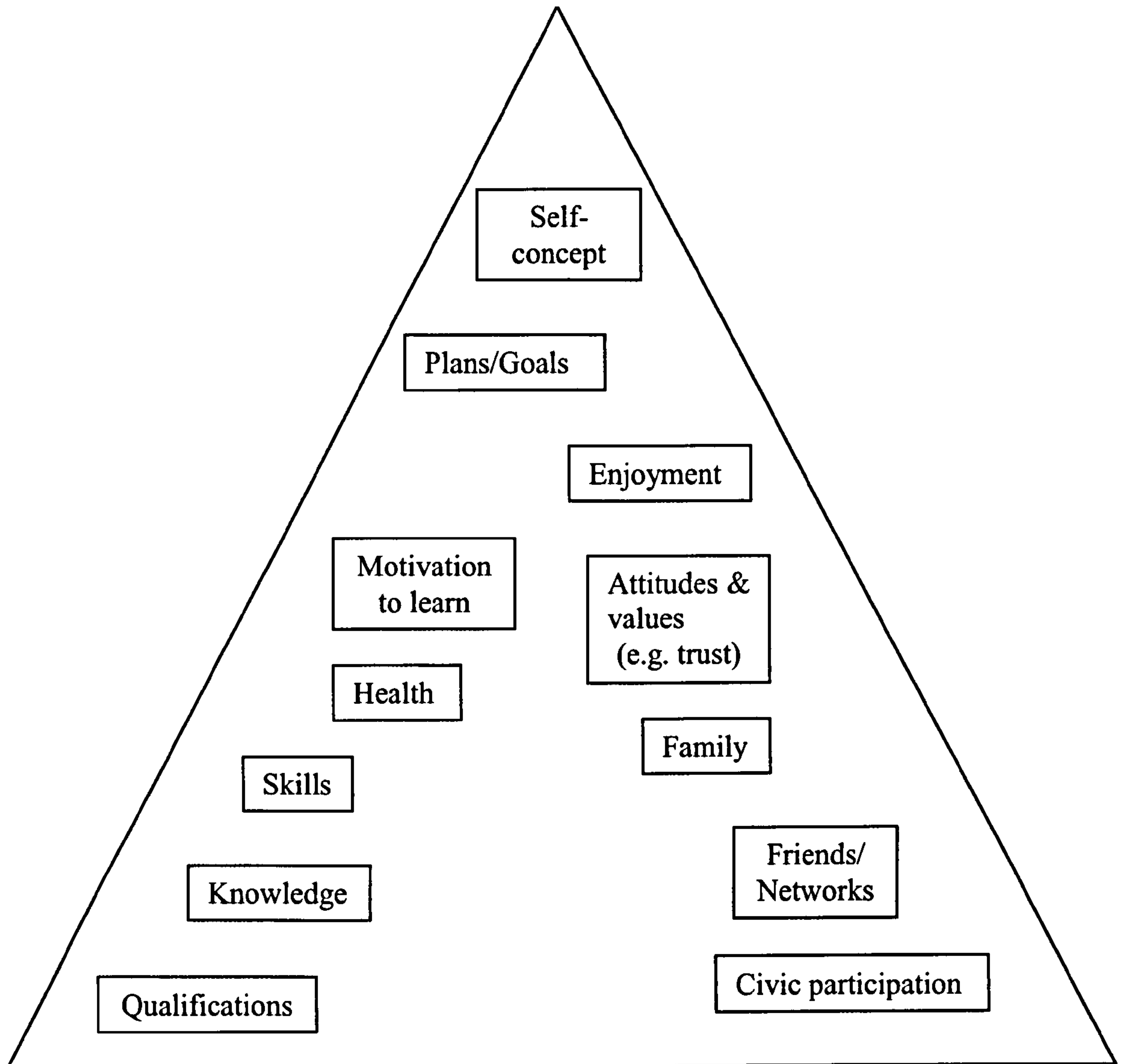
A second framework for analysis of the benefits of education has been developed by the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (Schuller et al., 2002). The framework was initially developed as a tool to assist in the thematic analysis of data obtained from 140 in-depth biographical interviews with adult learners, as part of a research study that set out to explore causal links between learning of different kinds and its effects. The researchers have subsequently presented the framework as a tool to be used by others within the Research Centre and elsewhere.

This simple triangular framework (Figure 3.1), underpinned by theories of both human and social capital is made up of three poles of human capital, social capital and personal identity, with the sides of the triangle approximating to the socio-economic, the socio-psychological and the psycho-economic. Schuller et al. (2002) populate the framework with twelve categories of benefit identified through an analysis of their data, locating them according to their relationship to the three poles of human and social capital and personal identity. The triangle is designed to show that the three dimensions intersect and that many outcomes or benefits – both intermediate and final – are a combination of two or all of the polar concepts. As an illustration "health may be affected by the skills a person is able to deploy, or by the sets of relationships in which they are involved and

Figure 3.1: Triangular conceptualisation of the social benefits of learning (Schuller et al., 2002: 10)

PERSONAL IDENTITY

The characteristics of the individual that define his or her outlook and self-image. It includes specific personality characteristics, such as ego strength, self-esteem, and internal locus of control.



HUMAN CAPITAL

Knowledge, skills and qualifications that individuals acquire as a consequence of organised learning. Developed mainly in an economic context, to explain why individuals or groups of individuals vary in income, productivity or chances.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The norms and networks that bring people together to mutual advantage. It is not, or not only, a personal attribute or asset, but refers to the relationships that exist between individuals or groups of individuals.

by their personal outlook on life and view of themselves; and all of these factors interact” (Schuller, et al., 2002: 11).

Schuller et al. (2002; 2004) acknowledge that their model is a simplification in three main ways. Firstly, because there are many other outcomes that could be included in the triangle as potential benefits of learning. The researchers argue however that the model is not intended to be comprehensive in its content, but is designed as a framework with potential for embracing most other issues. Indeed, although their analysis of interview transcripts focussed initially on the outcome fields set out in the model, they subsequently identified other outcomes that emerged from the accounts (Schuller et al., 2002). Secondly, while the outcomes have simple labels, they represent complex, and sometimes contentious, concepts that need to be critically examined (Schuller et al., 2004). The third simplification is that the model presents a static picture of the benefits of learning, regardless as to whether they are intermediate or final outcomes. The researchers argue that this is because some outcomes can also be regarded as a means to a further end. “It therefore would not make sense to define a single linear sequence with discrete categories of intermediate and final outcomes that hold good in all circumstances.” (Schuller et al., 2002: 11)

Despite these simplifications, the model was still of value as an analytical framework within my study. Firstly, any additional outcomes emerging from the data could be included in the triangular framework and the model could also be easily adapted to show, for any particular individual, which outcomes impacted upon or led to the emergence of others. Secondly, while the outcomes in the model have simple labels, the adoption of qualitative semi-structured interviews as my research tool enabled me to explore the complexities that lie beneath these labels. However, while the model appeared to be a useful tool for presenting an overview of the outcomes of learning, it did not allow for a detailed exploration of my research question concerned with learners’ perceptions of the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits.

While having a number of limitations, the frameworks developed by McMahon (1998) and Schuller et al. (2002) were both of considerable value in the shaping of my study. Firstly, the categorizations used within both models enabled me to clarify the focus of my study, while the benefits featured within the models provided an initial set of categories with which my data could be analyzed before moving to identify additional benefits emerging out of my data.

Further studies on the benefits of learning

In addition to the two frameworks outlined above, my review also covered a much wider range of studies into the benefits of adult learning, each with their own distinctive focus. Some focus on particular groups of people such as older adults (Dench and Regan, 2000) or parents (Brasset-Grundy, 2002). Others focus on a particular type of learning or educational sector, such as adult and community education (McGivney, 1994; Balatti and Falk, 2002), further education (Preston and Hammond, 2002) or higher education (Bynner and Egerton, 2001). Others focus on particular subjects such as basic skills (Bynner et al., 2001) or arts and culture (Lines et al., 2003). A final group focuses upon particular benefits such as the impact of learning on crime (Feinstein, 2002a) family formation and dissolution (Blackwell and Bynner, 2002), and health (James, 2001; Feinstein, 2002b). The Research Centre into the Wider Benefits of Learning has also provided a comprehensive look at the research evidence for a number of broad categories of benefit – health; ageing; families; crime; citizenship; and lifestyle and leisure – which have subsequently been used to develop tools for further research (Brasset-Grundy, 2002; Preston and Hammond, 2002).

Two studies of particular interest and relevant to my study were those conducted by McGivney (1994) and Balatti and Falk (2002), who both adopted a qualitative approach in exploring the personal, social and wider economic benefits of participating in adult and community education. A detailed examination of both of these studies not only provided a comparator against which the outcomes of my study could be set, but also informed my research design.

Mediating factors: how are the benefits of learning acquired?

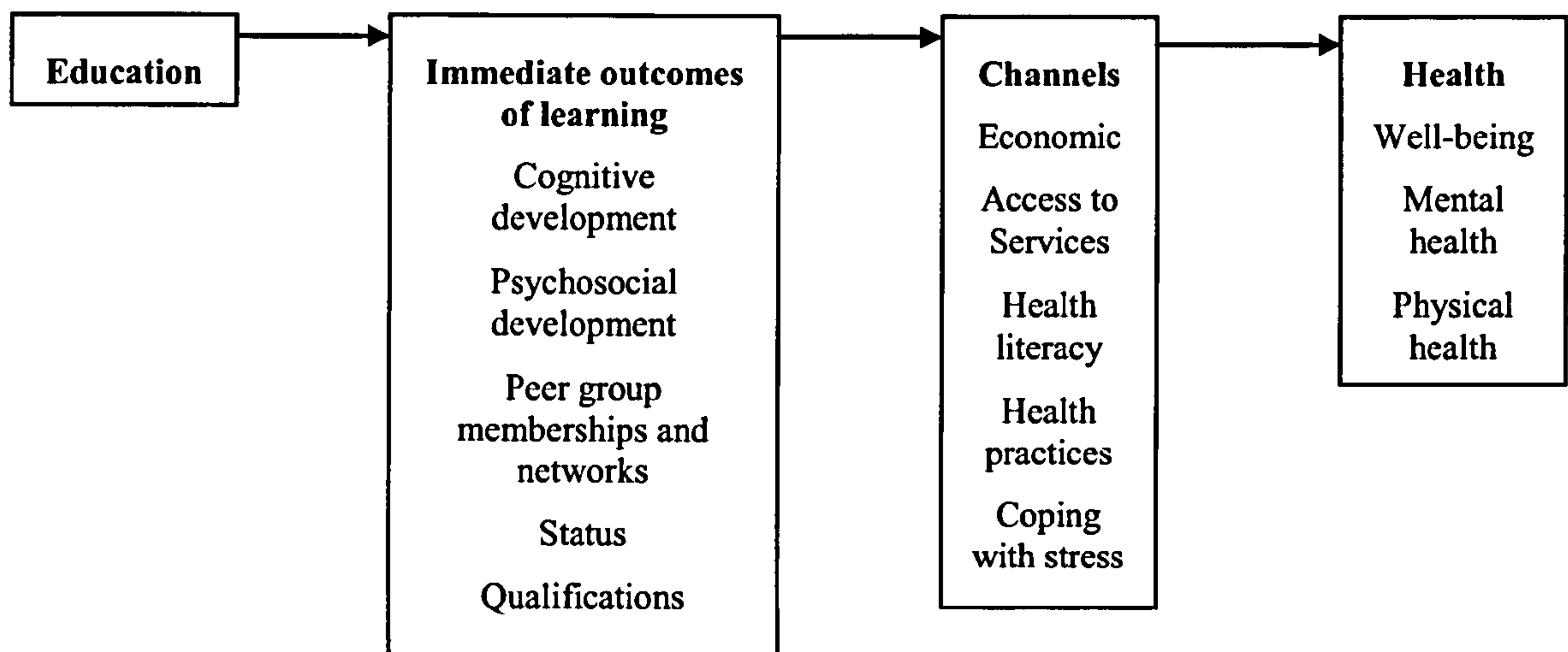
As well as identifying what the benefits of learning might be, it is also important that policy-makers and practitioners understand how these benefits can be realised. While much of the research identified in the sections above contributes to our thinking on what the benefits of learning could be, few focus on the identification of the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits. Although my initial aim within the study had been to focus solely on what the benefits of adult and community learning might be, the paucity of research into the mediating effects of education and its benefits as revealed by the literature review, led to construction of my third research question to include this issue.

Within the literature, it is possible to identify two main ways in which the processes through which benefits of learning are realised are dealt with. Firstly, researchers at the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre have developed a simple model that incorporates the mediating mechanisms that link education to its benefits, before then applying it to specific areas of interest (DfES, 2006b). They suggest that the wider benefits of learning can be realised through three major channels: personal characteristics and skills, social interactions, and qualifications. An illustration of how the model can be developed in relation to specific benefits of learning is available from Hammond (2002; 2004), who from a review of the literature around education and health, developed the model to reflect the processes through which education affects health and well being at the level of the individual. The model shown in Figure 3.2 below illustrates the immediate impacts of education, referred to by Schuller et al. (2004) as capabilities, and the channels by which these immediate outcomes are translated into health benefits.

Although the model provides a useful starting point for thinking about the benefits of learning and the mechanisms through which they are produced, it has its limitations for use within my study in its current format. The model portrays a simplistic linear process that fails to reflect the dynamic nature of the relationships involved and the contexts in which these relationships are located (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006). The model also appears to assume

direct causal relationships between participating in learning and outcomes, taking no account of the prior characteristics of learners or of other factors external to the learning experience. Despite this, being able to diagrammatically map out the potential relationships between learning and outcomes is a useful tool in developing theory.

Figure 3.2: A model of the processes through which education affects health and well being (Hammond, 2002; Hammond, 2004)



A second way in which the literature addresses issues around the process through which benefits of learning are realised is in relation to aspects of the learning experience, for example, where opportunities to interact with other students in a classroom context lead to the development of new friendships that extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Although extensive research is available on what constitutes good teaching and learning (see www.tlrp.org/), very few of the studies that focus on the benefits of learning have attempted to explore how these benefits are associated with what takes place in the classroom. Two exceptions to this are found within the work of the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre (Preston and Hammond, 2002; Schuller et. al, 2002). From in-depth interviews with learners, Schuller et al. (2002) identified key factors including learning context; the familiarity of location of learning; teaching style; support and encouragement; guidance; pressure; pace of learning, level of goal and type of feedback; learning as a group; and encouragement for critical thinking. Taking a different approach, Preston and Hammond (2002) sought tutors'

views on which aspects of their practice would be most conducive in the production of wider benefits: Practitioners reported that the key aspects of the learning experience included the interaction between learners, the opportunities for learners to follow their own interests and talents through the course content, opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their own learning, a teaching style which showed respect, patience and understanding with learners, and a positive learning environment.

Although my study was not intended to have a specific pedagogical focus, I anticipated that what happened in the classroom would be important in the development of a range of learning benefits. In order to find out more about the learning experience therefore, the first wave interview included a set of questions about the course being studied and what takes place within the classroom.. Learners were also asked about how they considered that these factors contributed, or otherwise, to the benefits they experienced.

The literature on selected benefits of learning

The first wave of interviews included a number of general questions about the learning in which participants were engaged, in order to identify the *range* of benefits experienced by each learner. My analysis of this data resulted in the use of ten broad categories of benefit. During subsequent interviews, I chose to concentrate, through a process of progressive focussing, on developing my understanding of a smaller number of benefits in more depth (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972). During the second wave of interviews, data was again collected on a broad range of benefits, with more detailed information sought on the categories identified within the analysis of the first wave of interviews. The final wave of interviews, specifically focussed on just three of these categories of benefit – assessment and accreditation, working lives, and supporting and stimulating transition. The following sections provide an overview of how each of these three themes is covered within the existing literature around the benefits of learning. Presentation and discussion of my data in relation to these three themes can found in chapters 6 onwards.

Assessment and accreditation

Gaining accreditation for a successfully completed learning activity could be considered to be one of the most obvious benefits of participating in learning, and perhaps for this reason, the literature around the *wider* benefits of learning gives scant attention to it. Much of this literature fails to mention assessment and accreditation at all, although ‘qualifications’ are included in the triangular conceptualisation of the social benefits of learning devised by Schuller et al. (2002) Even here, however, qualifications are only briefly mentioned as being ‘developed mainly in an economic context to explain why individuals or groups of individuals vary in income, productivity or chances’ (Schuller et al., 2002: 9). Acquiring credentials also feature as a benefit of learning in the study undertaken by Balatti and Falk (2002), although the complexity beneath this label is not explored. Where research has been undertaken (Jenkins et al., 2002) the evidence shows that accredited courses are much less likely to result in quality of life and social capital benefits than those not leading to qualifications, highlighting the need for further research into the variable effects of different pedagogies and selection procedures (Schuller et al, 2004).

In recent years there has been a growing body of evidence, based on analysis of a number of large datasets such as the Labour Force Survey and the birth cohort studies to explore the relationship between qualifications and a range of personal, social and economic variables (Blackwell and Bynner, 2002; Feinstein, 2002a; Feinstein, 2002b; Blundell et al., 2004; Sabates and Feinstein, 2007; Jenkins et al, 2007). Most notably in terms of policy impact was the evidence presented within the Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006), which sought to highlight the relatively low level of skills in the UK workforce as demonstrated by formal qualifications.

Drawing on such research, current education policy tends to focus heavily on the importance of achieving qualifications and the benefits that they can bring to individuals as well as to the wider economy (DIUS, 2007). However the simplistic approach to the benefits of achieving qualifications, featured within the policy literature, tends to falsely conflate qualifications

with skills and competencies (NIACE, 2006), often fails to discriminate between types of learner and learning, or of the age and stage at which learners gained their qualifications, and gives little attention to the benefits of engagement in, rather than achievement of accredited learning. My focus on the theme of assessment and accreditation within my data analysis was selected in response to this gap in the literature. Through the use of semi-structured interviews I considered that my study would enable me to investigate how and for whom assessment and accreditation is perceived as a benefit of learning.

Working lives

There is a growing body of evidence on the relationship between learning and work with research showing that investment in education can enhance levels of employment, income and productivity (Walker and Zhu, 2003; Jenkins et al, 2007). While some of this is based on an analysis of measurements of human capital such as highest level of qualification or time spent in education, research has also been undertaken into issues such as the role of both formal (Blundell et al., 1996) and informal (Felstead et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2007) workplace learning.

Despite this, relatively little of the research around the wider benefits of learning focuses upon working lives, perhaps due to a perception that work related benefits are more associated with economic rather than wider benefits. However, despite a general tendency to perceive adult and community learning provision as being non-vocational, studies by both McGivney (1994) and Balatti and Falk (2002) report a range of benefits associated with the nature and quality of working lives, including finding employment or better employment, changing careers, being able to put skills developed to use in paid or voluntary work, improving work practices and quality of working life, using skills to generate income or start own business, and saving money by making, refurbishing or repairing items. Non-monetary job satisfactions were also reported by McMahon (1998) as being a potential non-market private benefit of education.

Further evidence on the benefits of non-vocational learning upon working lives is available from studies of employee development schemes such as Ford EDAP, which was well publicised in the mid 1990s (Maguire and Horrocks, 1995), and more recently through accounts of programmes where employers such as Siemens (Unionlearn, 2008) and Merseytravel (Unionlearn, 2007) are working in partnership with Union Learning Representatives to establish a culture of lifelong learning within the workplace. Reported benefits of such learning include higher levels of morale and motivation at work, reduction in staff turnover and reported sickness and increased levels of staff promotion.

While both McGivney (1994) and Balatti and Falk (2002) were able to identify a number of ways in which learning impacted upon working lives, I was keen to investigate the complexity of these relationships further, and in particular to look at how benefits associated with this theme emerged and developed over time. Of specific interest was the role of work in providing opportunities and barriers to learning, as presented in Cross's (1981) chain of response model, a seven stage process of the decision to participate. I also considered that this theme would be of particular policy interest in a context where publicly funded adult and community learning provision is being marginalised in relation to investment in vocational learning in order to support the skills development of the UK workforce. While evidence from employers inevitably concentrates on the benefits to the workplace, I was also keen to investigate further the benefits as perceived by the individual learner. My focus on the theme of working lives within my data analysis was thus selected in response to these gaps in the literature.

Supporting and stimulating transition

As with the previous two categories, the existing literature on the wider benefits of learning gives little attention to the theme of supporting and stimulating transition, although McMahon (1998) identifies lifelong adaptation as one of his non-market private benefits of education. In part this may be due to the limited number of longitudinal qualitative studies that allow for a detailed exploration of such issues. Neither of the two existing studies that focus on the wider benefits of participating in adult and

community education (McGivney, 1994; Balatti and Falk, 2002) report benefits of learning specifically associated with either supporting or stimulating transition.

Elsewhere, while considerable research exists into the role of learning in supporting the transition of young people into work (Croll, 2008; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007; Woods, 2008), much less investigation has been made into the role of learning in supporting the transition of older people out of work into retirement (Withnall, 2000; Jarvis, 2001), and even less associated with other transitions such as those related to changing health or location.

While the concept of transition does not explicitly feature within the triangular conceptualisation of the social benefits of learning devised by Schuller et al. (2002), the concept of identity capital is included as one of the three poles of the triangle, with benefits associated with self concept and plans and goals, located around this pole. Identity capital can be defined as including intangible assets such as internal locus of control, self esteem, self purpose in life, ability to self actualize and critical thinking abilities that provide individuals with the capacity to understand and negotiate obstacles and opportunities that they face in life (Côté and Levene, 2002:144). Thus the role of learning in developing identity capital can be seen as essential for its ability to support learners through periods of transition.

Despite the paucity of focus on transition within the literature on the benefits of learning, it features much more strongly within the literature on participation, with numerous studies identifying that the decision to participate in learning often coincides with changes or transitions in life circumstances (Mezirow, 1978; Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980; Cross, 1981; McGivney, 1993; Sargant and Aldridge, 2002). In particular, the theory of transformative learning, first introduced by Mezirow (1978), is based on the assumption that everyone has constructions of reality, that are transformed when an individual's perspective is not in harmony with their experience. Mezirow (1978) suggests that such points of 'life crisis', for which there are no ready-made answers, can stimulate adults to return to learning (Jarvis, 1993). In such circumstances, learning becomes not merely about the

accumulation of knowledge, but rather a process in which assumptions and values held by the individual can be transformed. Furthermore, this emancipatory process can itself result in further change or transition. One of the most powerful examples, provided by Mezirow (1978: 102) is that of the women's movement whereby women who were engaged in learning, became aware of hitherto unquestioned myths and began to form new perspectives of themselves and their relationships, taking action to establish greater control and responsibility for their own lives.

In part, my focus on the theme of supporting and stimulating transition within my data analysis was selected in response to gaps in the literature on the benefits of learning, however I also made this selection because of my perception of the pertinence of this issue, given the dramatic rate of change involved in many aspects of modern life such as changes in the nature of work and of family life.

Summarising conclusions

Within this chapter I have sought to explore, from within the existing literature, the rationale for identifying the benefits of learning; the underpinning theories on which research into the wider benefits of learning are based; a number of the frameworks and classifications that have been used in the literature to explore what the benefits of learning are; and the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits. I have also provided an overview of how the literature in this field addresses each of the categories of benefit focussed upon within this study.

My review of the literature had a key role to play in the development of my research questions. My first research question was constructed particularly in response to gaps in the literature regarding the benefits of participation in learning rather than of those associated with highest qualification or time spent in education (OECD, 1998). Its focus on the wider or non-economic benefits of learning (Feinstein et al., 2003; McMahon, 1998; Little, 2003; Desjardins and Schuller, 2006), and on the context of adult and community learning provision (McGivney, 1994; Balatti and Falk, 2002; Leman, 2002), was also developed in response to gaps in the literature, as well to ensure

relevance to the current policy context. My second research question was constructed in response to the static nature of many of the existing studies, which have sought to identify the benefits of learning at any one particular time (Schuller et al., 2002). Where studies have sought to identify benefits over a period of time, these have generally adopted a retrospective approach and therefore been limited to a single narrative rather than being able to explore how the narrative develops over time (Ballati and Falk, 2002). My third research question was constructed in response to the paucity of research around the mediating factors involved in the production of benefits of learning (DfES, 2006b; Hammond and Feinstein, 2006)

As well as influencing the development of my research questions, my review of the existing literature on the wider benefits of learning also influenced my research design. In particular, my reading of the substantive literature steered me towards adopting a qualitative approach in order not only to be able to identify broad categories of benefit, but also to explore the complexity of issues and meanings within each of the categories and the mediating factors through which they are acquired (McGivney, 1994; Schuller et al. 2004). My review of a number of comparator studies guided me towards a longitudinal approach in order to be able to explore the emergence and development of benefits over time (Ballati and Falk, 2002; Sargant and Aldridge, 2003). Finally, my choice of themes on which to focus during my data analysis was also influenced by where I perceived there to be gaps in the literature, as well as by the policy context against which my study took place.

4. Methodology

Previous studies to identify the benefits of learning have used a wide variety of methodologies and data sources ranging from the production of in-depth case studies of individual students (Schuller et al., 2002), to the use of population or other large-scale surveys such as the UK cohort studies (Feinstein 2002a, Feinstein, 2002b). Drawing on these studies, as well as from the methodological literature, this chapter firstly provides a theoretical discussion of the issues associated with the chosen method – a longitudinal series of qualitative interviews – before going on to outline the particular methodological issues relevant to research into the wider benefits of learning. At each stage within the chapter I have sought to draw out the methodological principles that I have used to underpin the design of my study.

The adoption of a qualitative approach

Although a rigid distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches is unsound, qualitative research tends to focus on natural settings, is associated with the discovery and understanding of meanings and understandings, rather than simply with behaviour, and has an emphasis on process rather than merely on outcomes (Atkins, 1984). Qualitative research is also generally associated with acquiring in-depth and intimate information about a small group of informants rather than from a large representative sample of the population being studied (Ambert, et al., 1995), with qualitative methods particularly noted for their ability to grasp the complexity of the issues under investigation (Peshkin, 1988).

With a focus on exploring learners' views and perspectives on the benefits of their learning, and on the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits, I considered that the adoption of a qualitative approach would be most appropriate in addressing my research questions. In particular, my concern to discover the meaning that adults give to their learning experiences, as well as to explore and discover the complexity of a number of potential benefits, in greater depth than has been done previously, rather than to simply verify what is already available in the existing

literature (Peshkin, 1988), meant that it was necessary to adopt a qualitative approach. Such an approach would also be important in seeking to explore learners' perspectives on the processes involved in the production of these benefits.

Furthermore, as an area of policy interest, there has been considerable demand from policy makers for information on the impact of adult learning on a range of wider policy goals such as health benefits and active citizenship (Leman, 2002). In an attempt to meet these demands, researchers have begun to undertake analysis of large quantitative datasets where the amount of available data on a range of measures allows the use of statistical testing to produce highly precise results. However, although these measures are precise, doubts have been expressed (Schuller et al., 2001) as to their validity in measuring what is claimed. In the light of this criticism, I concluded that only a qualitative study, with a focus on 'documenting the world from the point of view of the people being studied' (Hammersley, 1992: 165) would provide me with the rich and detailed data that I would require to successfully address my research questions.

The interview as my research method

Having settled on the adoption of a qualitative approach to my study, I then needed to select the most appropriate method for collecting data. Although I had initially used a short questionnaire to collect contextual information from those learners interested in participating in my study (see Appendix 11.2), I considered the interview more appropriate as a primary method of data collection because of the increased flexibility and depth that this would facilitate (Pope and Denicolo, 1986).

Rapid growth in the use of the research interview in recent decades has been attributed, in part, to the emergence of an interview society (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002) which has seen the mass media and its audiences 'obsessed with the idea of interviews as a means of discovering and revealing secret personal realities behind public facades' (Hammersley, 2003). While I was unlikely to have been completely unaffected by this wider societal change, my reflections on the relative

strengths and limitations of potential research methods led me to believe that the research interview would be the most appropriate method for use within my study.

I considered that the use of semi-structured interviews would enable me to react to informants' responses by following up on issues of importance to them, or of interest to myself, instead of having to rigidly stick to a set of pre-determined questions that may or may not have been most appropriate. The use of interviews would also make it possible to explore processes and meaning systems (Hull, 1985), and to extract examples and illustrations that could provide me with a greater understanding of what the informant was seeking to articulate.

While the use of interviewing as a method of data collection has its limitations, for example, I would only be able to hear learners' experience being recounted rather than having direct access to experience, and within this, I would only be able to access the interpretations and understandings revealed in some way during the interview process (Mason, 1996), I did not consider that the adoption of any alternative method would enable me to overcome these limitations while still providing rich and detailed data on learners' experiences and reflections across the full breadth of their lives.

During the process of developing my research design, I had considered but rejected the use of a number of other qualitative approaches to data collection including observation, focus groups and the use of learner diaries. The use of observation had been discounted as I was keen to explore the benefits of learning across the breadth of learners' lives, far beyond that which would be observable within a learning context, and because of my interest in underpinning attitudes and meanings rather than solely in observable changes in behaviour. While, using learner diaries would have enabled me to overcome both of these challenges, and would have also provided a useful tool for learners to document their reflections between interview waves (Corti, 1993), I considered that my inability to prompt and question the learner during this process to be a significant limitation with this choice of method. I felt this to be of particular importance, given the

complexity of the subject and given the breadth of focus that I wished to encourage learners to take in their reflections on the topic. Finally, I chose to reject the use of focus groups, as I was primarily concerned with individual messages in relation to the benefits of learning and because I considered a group setting would not provide sufficient time, focus or confidentiality to concentrate in detail on sensitive or personal aspects of individuals' lives (Gibbs, 1997).

Representation or presentation?

A key issue arising out of the adoption of the interview as my main method of data collection was whether to take informants 'at their word' and treat the data as providing direct access to experience (Freeman, 1996; Dingwall, 1997), or to take an interactionist perspective and treat the data as a constructed narrative (Burgess, 1984; Mishler, 1986; Block, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Hammersley, 2003). The former assumes that accounts are a reliable representation of events, while the latter considers that accounts are presentational, that they are 'more about the research participants' relationship to the topic and the interview context than about the topic discussed' (Block, 2000: 758).

This section explores the concept of the constructed narrative which arises out of a three-fold critique of standard uses of interview data (Hammersley, 2003): firstly, in rejecting the idea that what people say represents what goes on in their heads; secondly, in expressing scepticism that accounts are able to represent reality; and thirdly, in questioning the validity of interview data, given that accounts are not based on rigorously collected data that are subject to systematic analysis.

The first element of this critique rejects the idea that what people say can be seen as representing what goes on in their heads, and instead suggests that interviews are a product of a 'contextually situated social interaction' (Murphy et al., 1998: 120) between the informant and researcher. What the informant chooses to say during an interview should therefore be viewed as being attuned to the specific context of the interview and influenced by what the informants consider is appropriate and plausible to say in the situation in

terms of self-presentation or persuasion of others, rather than as an accurate representation of events (Block, 2000; Hammersley, 2003). One implication of this, however, is that by viewing an interview account as being completely situation-specific, we are required to assume that it has no currency beyond the immediate context (Fleming, 1986). In response to this, Hammersley (2003) argues that although the language we use to express ourselves is a social product, this does not mean that some accounts cannot be more accurate than others. He also argues that although it is not always true that what people say in public derives from what they think in private, sometimes it does. Finally, Hammersley (2003) argues that just because interviews are a specific type of situation, it does not necessarily mean that what is said in these situations has no resonance or implication beyond this situation.

The second element of this critique expresses a broader scepticism about the ability of interviews to provide any account of reality, suggesting that instead, researchers should focus more on what accounts do and what cultural resources they employ rather than what the accounts are able to tell us. One of my key concerns in relation to this critique was that learners might choose to focus on what they considered to be culturally acceptable perceptions of benefits and experiences of learning, perhaps influenced by the college prospectus or advertising material or by what they understood of my study, rather than on their 'real' experience. Hammersley (2003) again counters this position by reminding us that we all routinely use people's accounts in everyday life as fallible sources of information about the world and people's perspectives, and that researchers should therefore be able to treat interview data in the same way.

The third element of this critique is based on the assumption that informants' accounts are more likely to be affected by error and bias than the observations of a researcher. In part this is because informants may have other concerns besides providing accurate information and in part because informants may lack the observational skills in which the researcher has been trained. While acknowledging that this may be true, Hammersley (2003) suggests that just because informants may have assumptions and

preferences it does not mean that their accounts are necessarily biased or will solely be a product of these things. We should also not assume that it is only the researcher who is concerned with the production of an accurate account.

For the purpose of my study I chose to treat interview data as constructed narrative; that is as a product of a contextually situated social interaction between the informant and myself. However, although it would be complacent to ignore the above critique, rather than abandoning my interview data as having no value at all, I instead chose to give more careful consideration to what my data could and could not provide (Hammersley, 2003). In order to maintain the plausibility and credibility of any claims made, I took steps to ensure that I developed a good understanding of the situation in which the research was taking place. For example, in designing interview schedules (see Appendices 2 and 4), I included questions that enabled me to collect relevant contextual information, as well as keeping a research diary of the processes undertaken.

A further implication of the decision to treat my data as constructed narrative was that my role could no longer be viewed as simply being that of a neutral data collector, but needed to be seen as that of an active participant in the construction of knowledge (Scott, 1999). It became even more appropriate, therefore, for me to try and understand the complexities of the interaction, rather than seeking to minimize them, for example through the use of standardized questions. Of particular concern was the need to address my own subjectivity in the process of knowledge construction. Having worked for over a decade in an advocacy organisation focused on the promotion of adult learning, I was aware that I would naturally be drawn to data that would appear to connect participation in learning with positive individual and social outcomes, as well as to develop arguments as to why it was participating in learning that resulted in such benefits, rather than any other factors. In order to limit this subjectivity, I explicitly asked learners their views on whether, and how, learning played a role in the production of the benefits discussed. During the data analysis stage, I also made a conscious effort to look for negative relationships, or disbenefits, within the

data, and to identify factors other than learning that could have produced these outcomes. Finally, I used subsequent interviews to discuss my interpretation of the data with learners, and to ensure that their views were not misinterpreted.

Epistemological approach and data analysis

In order to undertake an analysis of my data, I adopted a grounded theory approach (Gay and Airasian, 2003; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), an inductive research process that seeks to use generalised knowledge derived from specific observations to generate theory grounded in the data rather than presumed at the outset of the study.

The fundamentals of a grounded theory approach include: entering the research setting without having a pre-conceived hypothesis to be proved or disproved; collecting and analysing data concurrently; engaging in a process of constant comparison (Strauss, 1987) where data are constantly compared to one another to identify similarities and differences; undertaking theoretical sampling whereby the sampling of elements such as people groups or activities are guided by emerging theory (Strauss, 1987); the use of coding and categorising in order to document emerging themes, interrelationships and theoretical propositions; using the review of literature as one element of the data collection; and formation of theory (Probert, 2006).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) offer a three-staged process of developing data analysis within a grounded theory approach, using open, axial and selective coding. Open coding refers to the initial coding process during which the researcher asks the data a set of questions, analysing them in detail to avoid overlooking important categories and writing theoretical notes that will help in the analysis. Incidents are then compared and given conceptual labels. Axial coding consists of a detailed analysis of each category through a coding paradigm that involves consideration of the contexts in which it takes place in order to specify the connections between a category and its subcategories. Selective coding is the process by which all categories are

linked to the core category, which therefore becomes central to the integrity of the theory being developed (Strauss, 1987).

Since the formal introduction of grounded theory in the mid 1960s (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), educational settings, including those with a specific focus on the adult learner, have been one of its dominant areas of inquiry (Babchuk et al., 1996). Babchuk et al. (1996) argue that there are a number of reasons, relevant to my study, why grounded theory is particularly appropriate for research into adult education. Firstly, adult educators tend to be receptive to research strategies like grounded theory that are both meaningful and applicable to the kinds of issues with characterise practice settings. Secondly, because of its exploratory nature and emphasis on discovery, thus lending itself to many areas of adult education that do not have an established research base or theoretical foundation. Thirdly, the explicit focus within grounded theory on understanding the actions and interactions of social actors resonate with an emphasis within adult education on learning in the social context. Fourthly, the use of grounded theory in practice settings enables adult educators to see ways in which they might restructure the learning environment to consider the diverse needs of adult learners. Finally, it can be an effective means for adult educators to listen to the voices of learners, thereby enhancing collaborative planning and the subsequent realisation of the learner's educational goals (Babchuk et al., 1996: 23).

Like all approaches, however, grounded theory also has its critics, with key criticisms relating to its failure to acknowledge the implicit theories that guide research during its early stages and for its relative lack of clarity regarding the testing of theories once generated (Silverman, 2000). Silverman also notes the variable quality of studies adopting a grounded theory approach. At best grounded theory can offer an "approximation of the creative activity of theory building found in good observational work" however at its worst it can "degenerate into a fairly empty building of categories or into a mere smokescreen used to legitimate purely empiricist research." (Silverman, 2000: 145). In order to deliver the former rather than the latter, Pandit (1996) argues that researchers require both confidence and

creativity, suggesting therefore that novice researchers are likely to find the approach more difficult than more conventional methodologies and are therefore less likely to produce good theory as a result.

Despite being a novice in the use of grounded theory, I considered that a grounded theory approach would be most appropriate for use within my study for a number of reasons. Firstly because of the limited existence of theory associated with the exact nature of my study, and secondly, having adopted a constructivist paradigm it became important to incorporate the contextual complexities of the learners involved in my study (Cresswell, 1998). Consistent with a grounded theory approach, my research design included entering the setting without a set of pre-conceived hypothesis, collecting and analysing my data through a process of constant comparison, and adopting theoretical sampling techniques for second and third interview waves. I intended to adopt a broad interview format for the initial wave of interviews, with subsequent waves of data collection becoming more defined as themes emerged, contributing to theory formation.

Researching the wider benefits of learning

In their monograph on *Modelling and Measuring the Wider Benefits of Learning*, Schuller et al. (2001) summarise the main methodological issues within this field of research as being concerned with: validity versus precision; scope; association versus causality; data sources and practitioner research; pragmatism versus optimalism; and perverse effects. In order to discuss the methodological issues specific to this field of research, I have adopted the same six dimensions, providing illustrations from the reviewed material, and outlining the implications associated with each issue for the design of my study.

Validity versus precision

The first dimension is concerned with whether there is an appropriate balance between the validity of a particular measure; that is whether it measures what it is intended to, and its precision or reliability. For example, a number of studies seek to measure social capital through the use of individual level measures of association, trust, civic co-operation and

political engagement (Green et al., 2003). The amount of available data on these measures has allowed researchers to use statistical tests to produce the highly precise results often demanded by policy makers. However it could be argued that although these measures of association are precise, they might not be good indicators of social capital, hence may not be valid as measures. Caution should therefore be exercised in ensuring that the precision of the statistic is not confused with a description of the broad concept that it claims to represent. In contrast, qualitative studies are often recognised as displaying a more detailed picture of the object of study, while being criticised for their inability to precisely measure that which they describe and therefore not be able to provide ‘answers’. Having adopted a qualitative approach to my study, the development of measures on which to undertake statistical tests has not been a feature of my research. However, issues of validity and precision remain important in establishing appropriate categories for use within my data analysis. One of the key ways in which these were developed to ensure validity and precision was to test out my categorisations with learners in subsequent interviews. Having adopted a constructivist paradigm, I considered that this process of respondent validation was essential in ensuring that my categories accurately represented the meanings that learners had been seeking to articulate.

Scope – formal and informal learning

The second dimension concerns a major weakness of many studies in that they use poor indices for human capital, by concentrating first on the knowledge, skills and qualifications gained in formal education only, and second on very narrow measures of this, such as years of schooling (Schuller et al., 2001). A number of the studies reviewed to date are limited in this way (Bynner and Egerton, 2001; Bynner et al., 2001; Feinstein, 2002a; Feinstein, 2002b; Bynner et al., 2003). As a result, claims within such material are limited to the benefits of having achieved a certain level of skill or qualification, rather than of having actually participated in learning, as is the focus of this study. Linking back to the previous issue of validity versus precision, Feinstein (2002b) argues that this is often a result of empirical necessity rather than being driven by any theoretical or ethical consideration. I anticipated, however, that the use of learner interviews as

my chosen research method would enable me to address these issues within my study by providing access to actual accounts of experience rather than requiring me to rely on indices.

Association versus causality

Thirdly, policymakers are primarily interested in causing things to happen, rather than in just generating an association that can be recognized only subsequently. However, the design of many studies, and the difficulty in establishing exact causality means that much of the literature does not allow the possibility of distinguishing between the two (Schuller et al., 2001). For example, Green et al. conclude that “more educated individuals tend to join more voluntary associations, show greater interest in politics, and take part in more political activities” (Green et al., 2003: 3). However they confess that they cannot claim to have demonstrated a causal relationship between educational distribution and social cohesion, indeed they suggest that causality may run in different directions. While I was unable to make exact claims to causality within this study, the longitudinal approach undertaken allowed me to capture the temporal sequencing of events, enabling me to establish which outcomes followed particular aspects of the learning process. In addition, learners were asked during each interview for their views on the contribution that learning had made to the securing of any identified outcomes.

Data sources and practitioner research

The fourth dimension concerns the types of data used within the literature. It is argued that material should be based on the “best and most extensive datasets available in order to cover the range of issues involved” (Schuller et al., 2001: 10). The use of longitudinal evidence is particularly noted, as is the use of a wide range of sources including evidence from practitioners.

A number of items included in this review make use of longitudinal data (Dench and Regan, 2000; Feinstein, 2002a; Feinstein, 2002b; Schuller et al. 2002). In the main, these are based on the 1958 and 1970 UK Cohort Studies, in which data are collected from over 17,000 babies born in a particular week of those years, and a number of subsequent follow-up

surveys carried out at different life stages. These studies provide valuable data with which to examine the benefits of learning, as they contain a broad range of information about the individual, and allow researchers to establish the temporal order in which learning and its potential outcomes are achieved. However, researchers are required to rely on data produced by questions asked in previous sweeps, which may not be the most appropriate to answer a particular research question.

Additional materials within the review that make use of longitudinal data include Schuller et al. (2002) where 140 in-depth biographical interviews have been conducted with adults to trace the trajectories of their learning back to early schooling, and Dench and Regan (2000) where 336 National Adult Learning Survey respondents were re-interviewed two years after the initial survey. Both pieces of literature, however, adopt a retrospective approach to identifying the benefits of previously undertaken learning, rather than seeking to capture these benefits as they emerge and develop.

In order to develop the most appropriate dataset for my study, I chose to collect longitudinal data through a series of interviews with the same learners over a period of 18 months. For the purposes of this study, the term 'longitudinal' is taken to mean research in which data are collected for two or more distinct periods, the subjects of study are the same from one period to the next, and the analysis involves some comparison of data between periods (Menard, 1991: 4). While the length of time between the first and final interview waves was only 18 months, I considered that the use of such a limited timeframe still met the definition of longitudinal research provided above.

The purpose of adopting this approach was twofold: firstly, by introducing a longitudinal element to the research it would be possible to explore the emergence and development of benefits of learning over time, and secondly, through a process of progressive focusing (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972) I would be able to concentrate on exploring a small number of benefits of learning in more depth as my knowledge of the subject area developed. By adopting a longitudinal approach to my study, whereby informants were

asked about the learning in which they were engaged and the outcomes of this learning in their wider life during each interview, I considered that I would be able to address my second research question by identifying how particular benefits of learning emerge and develop over time and the mediating factors involved in this process. By interviewing a number of learners on several occasions I would also be able to identify how the narrative around their learning and its benefits evolved, rather than relying on a single narrative that retrospectively covered their experience over the previous two years. Finally, I would also be able to use subsequent interviews to test out and clarify patterns and themes that appeared to be emerging from the data, as part of the validation process (LeCompte, 2000).

The adoption of a process of progressive focusing within my study was based on the two-fold premise that firstly, my interviews with learners should be sufficiently flexible to allow for the emergence of unanticipated outcomes of learning (Dearden and Laurillard, 1977), and secondly, that there would be insufficient time to examine, in depth, each of the potential benefits of learning that could emerge during my interviews with learners (Pocklington and Jamieson, 1977). In taking this approach, I anticipated that the themes that I wished to pursue would become clearer and more refined with each wave of data collection and analysis, and questioning on each theme therefore more focused, penetrating and systematic (Pocklington and Jamieson, 1977).

Pragmatism versus optimalism

The fifth dimension concerns the tension between pragmatism and optimalism. Schuller et al. (2001) argue that while methodological or data inadequacies should always be identified and acknowledged, it is important to retain a sense of how significant they are, and what the prospects are for remedying them. For example, Feinstein is concerned with testing whether observed associations between depression and obesity on one hand, and qualifications on the other, are due to selection effects and the unobserved advantages of those that gain higher qualifications (Feinstein, 2002b). He acknowledges that his research is restricted by the availability of data, which enables him only to examine the effects of academic and vocational training

reflected in qualifications gained. However, having acknowledged this weakness and outlined plans to remedy this in the future, he asserts that the research is still of value in beginning to investigate this potential association.

As with all research, my study also has a number of methodological and data inadequacies, for example in the opportunistic nature of the initial sample. However, by acknowledging this and other weaknesses within my thesis, the study is still able to make a valuable contribution to the development of knowledge around the benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision.

Perverse effects

Finally, Schuller et al. (2001) acknowledge that while policy statements often appear to be based on an assumption of ‘the more the better’, there is a possibility that there may also be personal or social disbenefits to learning. This view is supported by a number of the studies reviewed, where examples of disbenefits include increased stress (James, 2001), increased consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (Schuller, 2003), and increased earnings derived from crime (Feinstein 2002a).

It is important to recognise that ‘benefit’ and ‘disbenefit’ are value laden terms, and although there will be near universal recognition that some outcomes are beneficial and others not, in other cases there may be more divergence of opinion. For example, in their review of the literature on *Learning, Family Formation and Dissolution*, Blackwell and Bynner (2002) report that the relationship between learning and divorce is particularly complicated. While divorce may be seen as a positive outcome for some, it may be considered as a negative outcome by others, depending upon a number of factors including values, perspective and ability to cope with particular circumstances. There are also instances in which the gains achieved by some individuals can directly or indirectly disadvantage others, for example where learning contributes towards the reinforcement of inequalities of power or social stratification (Schuller et al, 2004).

While the predominant focus of my study is upon the identification of learning *benefits*, a conscious effort was made, during my analysis of the data, to look for disbenefits and perverse effects. Learners were also explicitly asked about negative outcomes of their learning as part of the interview process, although most learners struggled to identify specific examples of where these had occurred.

Summarising conclusions

Within this chapter I have sought to draw from the methodological literature, as well as on the methods used within existing research into the wider benefits of learning, to provide a theoretical discussion of the specific issues associated with my chosen research method and the more general methodological issues relevant to research into the wider benefits of learning. In doing so, I have sought to draw out a number of methodological principles that have influenced my research design.

In particular, my review of the literature informed my decision to adopt a qualitative approach to my study, through the use of semi-structured interviews. Data from the interviews will be treated as constructed narrative and analysed using a grounded theory approach,

In order to address the main methodological issues identified by Schuller et al. (2001), the use of the qualitative interview as my primary method of data collection enabled me to avoid relying on poor indices for human capital such as highest level of qualification or years of schooling. A longitudinal design to my study, incorporating a number of interview waves enabled me to address a number of issues pertaining to association and causality, as it allowed me to capture the temporal sequencing of events while also being able to seek learners' views on the contribution that they perceive learning has made to the securing of identified outcomes. Engaging in a process of respondent validation through subsequent interviews also supported my commitment to ensuring the validity and precision of categories as part of my data analysis. Finally, the literature on perverse effects was a reminder of the importance of exploring negative outcomes as an essential part of a study seeking to understand the potential benefits of learning.

5. Methods

Drawing on the methodological principles discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter provides an account of the methods used within my study. It begins with a description of the location in which the study is based, before going on to outline the processes undertaken to access and select the sample of learners involved. The three interview waves undertaken, and the issues associated with them, are then described. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the steps taken to analyse the data collected, and to draw out the implications of the research findings for policy and practice.

The location of the study

The study was based in a city centre adult education college through which, at the time the study commenced, the Local Authority directly delivered the majority of its adult and community learning provision. The site of study was chosen primarily for pragmatic reasons in terms of proximity of location and of ease of access through established relationships with senior managers. The use of a single site, however, inevitably meant that it would not be possible to generalise my findings to learners studying with different types of adult and community learning providers in other locations.

Accessing and selecting a sample of learners

In order to gain access to learners, the college agreed that I could place a letter inviting volunteers to participate in the research in each course register, to be read out by the tutor. This was accompanied by a short questionnaire (see Appendix 11.2), that learners who were interested in taking part could complete and return to me via the college. The questionnaire contained simple factual questions about the learner such as age, gender and employment status, previous educational experience and details of any courses currently enrolled upon, which could then be used as contextual information from which to select an appropriate sample of informants.

In all, over 70 learners returned a questionnaire to the college. However, as half of the questionnaires were subsequently mislaid in the post for a number of months, I had a much smaller sample from which to select my

learners, only six of whom were in the age group I had initially been interested in focusing on – adults in their forties and fifties. After some reflection, I decided to include all respondents of working age in my sample. I excluded respondents beyond this age, despite the large proportion of such adults enrolled in adult and community learning provision both locally and nationally, as I was keen to explore issues in relation work and the economy as part of my data analysis. As a result of the limited number of potential informants, age was therefore the only selection criteria used in identifying the sample of learners for my study and it was not possible to take account of other variables such as previous experience of adult learning and highest level of qualification. As a result, the sample included much more homogeneity across these two variables that I would have otherwise selected. Inevitably, the use of volunteers also introduced a potential source of bias.

In total, fourteen adult learners, aged 60 or younger, were selected to take part in the study (see Table 5.1). A mother who attended an interview with her daughter added to the number of volunteers, as did a young woman whom I met in the college cafeteria between interviews. As well as reducing the number of learners from which I was able to select, the loss of half of the questionnaires also resulted in informants coming from a more limited range of courses that might otherwise have been. One of the major lessons learned at this time was the often-contingent nature of the data that a researcher has to work with (Silverman, 2000).

Table 5.1: Learner profiles

Pseudonym	Courses enrolled on	Gender	Age	Employment status	Highest level qualification	No. of interviews
1 Pippa	Aromatherapy Massage; Greek	Female	30-39	Employed full time	Level 4	3
2 Derek	Intermediate Mandarin	Male	50-59	Retired	Level 4	1
3 Simon	Intermediate Mandarin	Male	30-39	Employed full time	Level 5	1
4 Judi	Greek	Female	50-59	Retired	Level 5	3
5 Tom	Astronomy for Beginners; Level 4 French; GCSE Spanish	Male	60-69	Retired	Level 5	2
6 Ted	French; Shorthand	Male	30-39	Unemployed	Level 4	2
7 Jo	Stuart History; Local History; Travel Talks	Female	50-59	Retired	Level 4	1
8 Jan	Level 1 Computing	Female	50-59	Not working – incapacity	Level 4	3
9 Mick	Greek	Male	30-39	Employed full time	Level 4	2
10 Alison	Introduction to Pottery; Jazz and Blues Singing	Female	30-39	Not working - incapacity	Level 4	3
11 Naomi	Greek	Female	20-29	Employed full time	Level 2	2
12 Anne	Greek	Female	40-49	Employed part time	None	2
13 Bernard	Italian	Male	50-59	Employed part time/ retired	Level 4	1
14 Brian	Intermediate Mandarin	Male	50-59	Employed part time	Other ¹	1

¹ Vocational qualification outside of National Qualifications Framework

Ethical issues

In line with the British Educational Research Association guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2004), I took a number of measures to fulfil my responsibilities to research participants. These included ensuring

voluntary informed consent by explaining in writing in the initial invitation letter, as well as verbally at the beginning of each interview, details of the interview process, what their role as participants would be, how the data would be used, and who would have access to the data and my analysis of it. At the beginning and end of each interview, I also verbally informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and made a commitment to sharing my findings with them. In considering my ethical responsibilities, I also sought to ensure confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data in both its use and storage, by using pseudonyms within my analysis and reporting, and by ensuring that any identifying information was stored separately from the interview data.

The research method

This section provides an account of the first wave of interviews. As well as discussing the content of the interviews and how they were recorded and transcribed, it also deals with a number of issues raised within the initial and subsequent interviews in relation to the importance of listening, the use of different types of location, the identification of a learner's understanding of the interview and whether interviews are a simply a reflection of, or also a catalyst for, learners ideas and perspectives.

The first wave of interviews

The first wave of interviews was undertaken with fourteen adult learners during the 2004 autumn term (see Table 5.1 above for details of the learners involved). A semi-structured interview schedule, based on issues raised within the literature and within an initial pilot undertaken several months earlier with a different set of learners, was developed to explore the context of the learning currently taking place (Block, 2000; Hammersley, 2003), informants initial expectations of the outcomes of their learning, whether their expectations had been met during the term, and the initial effects of their learning whether positive or negative, anticipated or unexpected (See Appendix 11.3). Through these broad areas of questioning I sought to explore both the anticipated and realised outcomes of learning.

Following a short introduction to my research, I chose to adopt an introductory question that explored the learning in which informants were currently involved, in order to help make them comfortable with the interview process, confident about their ability to answer my questions and clear about how their experiences fitted within my study (Dilley, 2000). Following on from this introductory question, the use of a semi-structured interview schedule enabled me to ask subsequent questions that were of particular relevance to the individual learner and that followed on from their responses. Because the nature of what I was trying to discover through my study was complex, and not necessarily clearly formulated in learners' minds in a way that was simple to articulate in response to standardised questions, this approach seemed most appropriate. On a number of occasions I found it necessary to approach subjects in a number of ways, using different questions in different formats (Dilley, 2000), for example when seeking to find out about initial expectations of outcomes from their learning, a number of learners responded well to a direct question on expectations, while others responded better to questions around motivation. Others still were only able to identify their initial expectations after first talking about their experience of outcomes to date and then reflecting on whether these were different from what had been anticipated.

Unlike some of the research projects that I am involved in through my professional work, here I was unable to offer incentives for learners to take part in the study. I therefore made every effort to ensure that the process was as convenient, interesting and enjoyable as possible in order to secure the continued involvement of these learners. Oliver (2003) argues that it is easy to forget that as researchers, we are often the ones who stand to gain most from our research activity. He encourages us to recognise the centrality of interviewees, ensuring that they feel that their views are appreciated and valued. One of the key ways in which I sought to do this was to explain to learners the importance of the data collected within interviews, and in subsequent interviews, to share my emerging thoughts from the data as well as my overall progress with the study. I also sought to arrange the location and timing of interviews to be as convenient as possible for the learners involved.

Recording and transcription

Both the initial and subsequent interviews were recorded on audiotape, with the learners' permission, and then later transcribed (see Appendices 11.4 and 11.6 for examples) and supplemented with field notes. All of the interviews within the first two waves were fully transcribed, although in the third wave due to time restrictions, interviews were only partially transcribed. The use of audio recording allowed me to concentrate on actively listening to learners' responses, while still ensuring that I had an accurate account of the conversation without having to rely on my own recollections and without the need to take more than brief field notes on my own observations as well as on any issues that I wished to follow up on later in the interview. Beyond the life of this particular research study, the audiotapes could be used as a public record of the data, which is open to the scientific community, and can be replayed enabling transcripts to be improved and analysis undertaken on a different tack without being limited by the original transcripts (Sacks, 1984).

The completed transcripts, supplemented by field notes, also enabled me to avoid reducing the interview into only its verbal elements (Hull, 1985), as well as assisting my analysis by placing me in the position of being able to interpret what was said in the light of my knowledge of the meaning systems of informants. Hull expresses a note of caution in relation to what he calls these 'black market understandings' (Hull, 1985: 28) as they place the researcher in the powerful position of having a unique understanding of the data that is unaccountable to that which is available to other researchers. The inclusion of contextual information and details of the research process within this chapter are designed however to provide such an account.

Listening

In a successful interview, listening skills are as important as a researchers' questioning technique and not only include an awareness of what is happening verbally, but also requires the researcher to make eye contact and understand body language, gesture and expressions. A good listener also notes and gives consideration to the content and emotion of what is being

said, hinted at, or even avoided (Pope and Denicolo, 1986), as well being aware of the simultaneous tasks which the researcher must engage in. As Dilley (2000) illustrates:

“When I interview, I hear more voices in my mind than my physical voice and that of my respondent. One keeps track of time, another considers how the previous answer is similar to a response from a prior respondent, and yet another voice listens to the current answer and notes a discrepancy between this answer and the one just given to a different question. And of course, there is ‘my’ one voice that is the active participant in the conversation at hand.”

(Dilley, 2000: 134)

Although initially, I found it very difficult to manage this wide variety of tasks at the same time, the experience gained through undertaking and reflecting upon twenty-seven interviews throughout the duration of my study, and upon a previous three interviews undertaken as part of a pilot study, enabled me to develop my skills in this area. During the initial interviews, I found that I kept mainly to the questions in the interview schedule, while in subsequent interviews, I became more confident and adept at identifying areas for further questioning or for clarification. For example in her first interview, Pippa referred to the role that learning plays in renewing her energy. When this was referred to again in her second interview, I probed further exploring the impact that this had on her work and wider life, as well as asking for examples that would enable me to better understand what she meant by this phrase. As the interviews progressed, I found that I became more comfortable with the process of interviewing, better able to listen to the many ‘voices in my mind’ (Dilley, 2000: 134), and more skilled in asking questions that were focused, penetrating and systematic (Pocklington and Jamieson, 1977).

Location

For reasons of convenience for the learner, most of the initial interviews took place in an interview room at the college, either directly before or after

their classes. Two interviews took place at the learners' place of work during lunchtime and three took place at learners' homes. Many of the second wave of interviews also took place at the college, however all of the third wave of interviews took place in the learners' own territories; three in their own homes and one in a small office at a learner's workplace. Comparing, in particular, the first and third interviews, I observed that the discussions within the latter were longer and more detailed, and contained more reference to the learners' personal life. Learners also talked more about their feelings and perspectives rather than simply providing a factual account of what had happened to them during, or as a result of, their learning. For example, one learner talked in detail and with much emotion about the significant deterioration in her physical and mental health, while another talked about the death of her mother and the impact that this had had on her life.

Although it is well documented that individuals present themselves differently in different locations (Ball, 1993), it was not easy to isolate, from other factors, the impact of location upon these learners. One possible explanation for the change in interview content is that because learners were being interviewed in a more informal and familiar setting, they felt more comfortable to discuss their lives at a deeper level. However, other possible explanations were that learners felt more able to open up to someone they had met and spoken with twice before than to someone they were speaking to for the first time, or that they felt better equipped to talk about the benefits of their learning having done so before, and probably reflected on them since. It is also possible that my developing interviewing skills contributed towards this change.

Reflection or catalyst?

A further issue that became apparent particularly during the third wave of interviews, was that as well as being a reflection of learners' ideas and perspectives, the interview can also act as a catalyst that changes these ideas and perspectives, clarifying and strengthening them, weakening them or even transforming them (Pope and Denicolo, 1986).

One of the purposes of the third wave of interviews was to test out and clarify patterns and themes that appeared to be emerging from data provided in the preceding interviews, through a process of respondent validation. As well as asking learners about their own particular experiences, I also sought to do this by asking them for their views on the categorisations of benefit and mediating factors that I had developed through my analysis, as well as on my emerging theories. On several occasions it became evident that this opportunity for reflection, both on a personal level and through interaction with another individual interested in the topic, led to a development in their thinking. Alison, who had stopped going to college one month before her third interview due to ill health and had subsequently entered a period of depression provided the most powerful example of this. She had been feeling particularly down since Christmas and had originally attributed this to the time of year and the decline in her physical health. During the process of the interview, however, she began to realise that having to leave the college was a significant factor in how she was feeling, and resolved to start learning again as soon as she was able. Although this process of catalytic validity, the degree to which the research process re-orientates, focuses and energises participants, runs counter to the idea of researcher neutrality, Lather (2003) argues that it is important in allowing us to recognise the reality altering impact of the research process and also “on the need to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self understanding and ideally self determination through research participation.” (Lather, 2003: 191)

Understanding the interview situation

In seeing my interview data as constructed narrative, it also became important for my analysis and interpretation of the data to take account of the situation in which it was generated, of the meaning systems of informants and of their understanding of the interview situation (Hull, 1985). One of the ways in which I sought to gain insight into the latter, was to incorporate a question at the end of the second interview to explore learners' reasons for participating in the study. I considered that this was of particular importance, given that my sample was comprised of volunteers, thus introducing a potential source of bias. As well as revealing their

motivation, their responses also provided me with an insight into their attitude towards learning. These data were also useful in being able to assess to what extent the benefits experienced by these particular learners might have resonance with the wider population of adult learners.

A couple of learners simply stated that they were happy to help out as they had the time to do so and felt that they had some sort of responsibility to be helpful if they could.

“And you think, what the hell, I’ve got the time..... But now that I mention it, one of the men in the French class is a student governor, and is retiring or has retired. He would come in and say there are two vacancies so if you know anybody, please vote. And that’s happened a couple of time so I suppose it’s that social responsibility” (Tom, wave 2)

A number of learners made reference to the value they placed on research in bringing about change and therefore their willingness to be involved.

“Because I think that pulling out people’s different experiences of things will lead to more knowledgeable change and you know people can look at it in more depth, make recommendations from that.” (Pippa, wave 2)

“One day I’ll think things have changed and it might be part of my contribution and I think that’s one of the reasons I got involved... I wanted to do it because I thought I want an impact and there are quite a few people like me and I thought if we got together I think it makes the research more valid and more useful.” (Ted, wave 2)

As illustrated by Ted’s quote, this was often coupled with a belief that their own experience would make a valuable contribution to the research being undertaken, as well as a commitment to the issues being researched. Having

had a career in education, both Jan and Judi felt that it was important to support research in this field, with a view to improving opportunities for future learners.

“I’ve always felt that it’s been important to aid research and I have gone out of my way to do that. If I think that I can contribute something valuable to the discussion, and when this was presented I thought, yeah, that’s something that would be good. It would help other people probably in the future... And if I can contribute in anyway to either improving or reinforcing or making changes that could be advantageous for other people in my position, I should do that and give something back for the opportunities I’m having here.” (Jan, wave 2)

As my sample was predominantly made up of recurrent learners, committed to the value of adult education, it is possible that their experiences of learning outcomes are more favourable than would be the case among the general adult population, although even among this sample, there was a recognition that outcomes may not always be positive, and that research evidence can contribute to the improvement of learning experiences.

Second and third wave interviews

Having undertaken initial interviews with fourteen adult learners during the Autumn term of 2004, a second wave of interviews were undertaken six months later with nine of these learners, and a third wave undertaken a further twelve months later with four of the same learners.

Selection and sampling are a necessary part of every research study, and although it cannot be eliminated, it is important for the researcher to reflect on and acknowledge its impact on data collection and thereby the usefulness of the research findings (LeCompte, 2000). One of the key selection decisions made within my study was in relation to the choice of learners to be re-interviewed in the second and third waves of interviews. Having adopted a grounded theory approach to my study, I was able to purposefully

select those learners that I believed provided the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 181). My interest in exploring a smaller number of the benefits in more detail, as well the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits, thus led me to select learners for subsequent interview waves who had referred, in earlier interviews, to the particular benefits in which I was interested. As a consequence, the results found within my study cannot be used to make generalisations about the full range of benefits, nor about the likelihood that any particular participant in adult and community learning provision would experience these benefits. Instead it is only possible to use the data to illustrate the ways in which some benefits have played out in the lives of these learners.

In order to allow for the emergence of unanticipated outcomes, the interview schedule for the first wave of interviews explored broad issues such as the nature of the learning activity taking place, the motivation for learning, and the expected and actual benefits of learning, stopping short of asking specific questions about particular benefits, but providing sufficient data to set the general direction of the study.

Consistent with a grounded theory approach, the multi-phased design of my study enabled me to engage in a process of collecting and analysing my data concurrently, with recursive analysis of themes within each interview wave shaping the design of the interview schedules for subsequent waves (Gay and Airasian, 2003). Following analysis of the data from the first wave of interviews, the schedule for the second wave (see Appendix 11.5) sought to explore the benefits referred to in the initial interviews in more depth, as well as again asking a broad question about benefits of learning. The schedule for the third wave of interviews was designed to probe more deeply into a smaller number of selected benefits, again balanced by a broad question on the benefits of learning. Second and third wave interviews were also used to explore the mediating factors involved in the production of the benefits of learning, and to test out and clarify patterns and themes that appeared to be emerging from the data, as part of the validation process (LeCompte, 2000). In taking this approach, the themes that I was interested

in became clearer and more refined with each wave of data collection and analysis, and although the questions in the initial wave of interviews had been necessarily broad, those asked in subsequent waves were more focused, penetrating and systematic (Pocklington and Jamieson, 1977).

In light of the limited time available in which to undertake my study, it was necessary to be purposefully selective both in terms of the learners interviewed in the second and third interview waves and also in the particular benefits on which I would choose to explore in more depth. This process of selection resulted in the systematic reduction in the breadth of my study, while facilitating greater depth in those areas on which I had chosen to concentrate. During the second wave of interviews I chose to question learners on the ten categories of benefit identified by Schuller et al. (2002: 11) plus an additional category relating to the role of learning in supporting and stimulating transition, which had emerged from the initial interviews. During the third wave of interviews, I chose to focus in more depth on three categories of benefit – assessment and accreditation, working lives, and supporting and stimulating transition.

Third wave interview schedules were individually tailored to the learners being interviewed and therefore varied considerably between interviews. In addition, unlike previous interview waves, third wave interviews were not fully transcribed and therefore examples are not included as appendices. Instead, when listening to the audio-tapes, I made notes of where relevant themes were discussed and these sections of text were then transcribed.

Data analysis

In order to enable my study to be scrutinized and questioned by those who were not directly involved in the process, Pope and Denicolo assert that “one must provide prospective readers with an open, frank and detailed discussion of the procedures used in analysis and interpretation of the data” (Pope and Denicolo, 1986: 155). The following section is intended to provide such a discussion of the procedures involved in my study.

Recognising the ongoing interaction between data collection and analysis within a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I embarked on my analysis following the first wave of interviewing in order to inform my later stages of data collection (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Having collected and transcribed the data, and supplemented them with field notes, I began by first 'tidying up' (LeCompte, 2000), ensuring that hard and electronic copies of interview schedules, transcripts and notes were filed in a systematic and easily accessible manner for future reference. I then coded the transcripts and cut and paste them into a series of electronic documents, associated with a number of broad areas of benefit. These documents included relevant quotes, a reference to the informant making the quote, details of the question to which they were responding, my initial thoughts on the interpretation of the quote, and suggestions for questions to explore the issue further during subsequent interviews. Data obtained in subsequent interview waves were added to this record (see Appendix 11.7 for an example). As well as informing subsequent waves of data collection, my approach of analysing the data relating to each theme at every stage, and adding to it after each interview wave, rather than only producing an analysis when all three interview waves were completed, also enabled me to explore within my data how benefits emerged and developed over time.

One of the consequences of choosing to treat my interview data as constructed narrative rather than as providing direct access to experience was the need to recognise my role as an active participant in the construction of knowledge (Scott, 1999). While one of the hallmarks of grounded theory design is that the researcher must as much as possible set aside their preconceptions and theoretical notions so that the substantive theory can emerge from the data, some researchers (Probert, 2006) argue that grounded theorists can never consider themselves objective and can thus include their prior knowledge as another form of data that helps them to better understand the processes being observed. Furthermore Silverman (2000: 63) argues that to start completely afresh is to risk reinventing the wheel. Based on this argument, my initial approach to the categorization of the data from the first wave of interviews was to begin with the ten broad categories of benefit identified by Schuller et al. (2001), before then going

on to review the interview transcripts for additional recurring regularities (Merriam, 1998: 180) identifying an additional benefit associated with the role of learning in supporting and stimulating transition. This approach was adopted in an attempt to find an appropriate balance between “bearing in mind the categorizations of utterances derived from prior studies and being sensitive to the need to account for further utterances which do not fit the modelling of such studies” (Pope and Denicolo, 1986: 158).

Within each broad area of benefit, I initially embarked on an open coding process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to develop a set of categories, or conceptual constructions capturing recurring patterns in the data (Merriam, 1998). To do this I used a constant comparative method – comparing cases where a phenomenon existed with those where it did not, and seeing which conditions appeared to be associated with the phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in order to ensure that categories were consistent yet distinct. As tentative categories emerged, I tested them against the data as well as searching for alternative explanations from the data. Having taken the data apart in order to identify categories, I then embarked on a process of axial coding to put the data back together again in new ways to establish and elaborate on the connections between a category and its subcategories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This detailed analysis of each category involved examining the conditions that gave rise to it, the context in which it took place, the strategies in which it was carried out, and the consequences of these strategies (Babchuk, 1996). Finally, through a process of selective coding, I was able to begin to explore emerging theories, such as that of the permeability of boundaries between working lives and learning for personal development and pleasure, by exploring the relationships between sub categories and core categories.

In drawing out the implications of this study for policy and practice, the findings of this three staged process of analysis was also set against the context of a changing policy landscape and its extensive impact on provision and participation. In particular, the implications emerged from an exploration of the complex relationships between national policy and its impact, both intended and unanticipated, on individuals and groups of

learners. As well as using data collected from the three interview waves, additional data in terms of the policy literature reviewed as well as my own prior knowledge, also made an important contribution.

Summarising conclusions

Within this chapter I have sought to provide an account of the methods used within this study, accompanied by my reflections on the research process and its implications for the findings of this study. Issues covered include those associated with selecting my sample, undertaking and understanding interviews, analysing data and identifying implications for policy and practice. In particular, the chapter demonstrates that adopting a grounded theory approach to the collection and analysis of data, has served to provide a richness and depth to its results, allowing for the voices of adult learners to be heard and incorporated into the growing body of literature in this field of research.

6. Data: assessment and accreditation

The first wave of interviews had included a number of general questions about the learning in which participants were engaged, in order to identify the *range* of benefits experienced by each learner. My analysis of this data, informed by categorisations used by Schuller et al. (2002), but also including an additional category that emerged from the initial interview data around the theme of transition, resulted in the adoption of ten broad categories of benefit: accreditation and assessment, civic participation, confidence and self esteem, enjoyment and fun, health and well-being, knowledge and skills, progression, relationships, transition, and work and economy. My second wave interview schedule then sought to explore each of these categories in more detail, as well as again asking a broad question about benefits of learning.

As it would not have been feasible to explore my initial ten categories of benefit in detail, I chose to concentrate, through a process of progressive focussing upon three categories of benefit: assessment and accreditation, working lives, and stimulating and supporting transition. My choice of categories was influenced by four factors: firstly, because each of these subjects has received relatively little attention to date within the literature on the wider benefits of learning; secondly, because I considered that these categories lent themselves well to my chosen methodology; thirdly, having incorporated a longitudinal element into my study, it seemed appropriate to focus on categories where developments were likely to be seen over time; and fourthly, because I considered them as offering the most significant contribution in terms of reflections on, and implications for, policy and practice.

The following three chapters present an analysis of the three broad areas of benefit of learning on which I have chosen to focus my study. Each chapter provides an overview of the learners from whom the data are taken, before going on to look at the complexities of each area of benefit, how benefits emerge and develop over time, and at the mediating factors involved in their production.

While it is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of the other eight categories of benefit within this thesis, the following quotes provide a taste of the range of benefits experienced by this small group of learners:

In relation to *civic participation*, Jo described how participating in learning has opened up a range of social activities that have supported her to engage in the local community:

“We’ve just arranged to have a couple of social events per month and then we do a class at 11 o’clock or go in the gym or go swimming or whatever... So being a total outsider moving into a place, the College has been a great source of all sorts of things really, not only just education but also socially.” (Jo, wave 1)

In relation to *confidence and self esteem*, Ted describes how his initial success in learning has given him the confidence to carry on:

“I’ve done well on this course and I think once you done well and got that confidence then it spurs you on to go further.” (Ted, wave 1)

In relation to *enjoyment and having fun*, Alison explained her experience in her pottery class:

“I don’t think I expected to enjoy the pottery so much (laughs). I didn’t go into it thinking I’m going to really, really love this. It was like, it’s another class to do in my week, it’s something creative, it’s something fun.” (Alison, wave 1)

In relation to *health and well-being*, Judi talked about the value of learning for both mind and body, especially for older learners:

Just keeping your mind active, learning, going out, meeting people, interacting, having to chat, all of these things are very important for your mind, as well as your body I think... And I just feel the health benefits for old people are quite considerable.” (Judi, wave 2)

In relation to the development of *knowledge and skills*, Anne talked about how much more she felt she had learned by attending a class than she would have done through self-directed learning:

“With coming to this course, we’d have learned a bit more, well a lot more than what we would have done if we’d have just read it ourselves in the book.” (Anne, wave 1)

In relation to *progression*, Alison explained how she progressed from a taster session to a full course:

“I decided in the middle of last year that I was going to sign up for some taster courses, just one day taster courses to see if I could find something creative that I could do... It was the one taster course I managed to do last year. I just fell in love with it. So after that, I was determined to get onto the actual full course. I managed to get on the waiting list and get on the last term of last year and then I got onto this years’.” (Alison, wave 1)

In relation to *relationships*, Judi explained how learning had helped her to meet new people and expand her circle of friends following a move to a new city:

“Meeting new people, that has been really helpful because you know, you are meeting people from all over the place, not just your immediate neighbourhood. So it’s spreading your circle of friends.” (Judi, wave 3)

This chapter presents an analysis of the data on assessment and accreditation, suggesting that it is a complex issue which emerges for some learners, not only as a benefit of learning for its own sake, but also as an intermediate outcome, or mediating factor, which can lead to additional benefits of learning. For others, however, the assessment and accreditation of their learning is seen as being of negative consequence. The chapter begins with a description of the learners from whom the data is taken and the learning in which they are participating before going on to look at learners' attitudes towards assessment and accreditation as revealed within the interviews. It then moves on to look at the benefits of participating in accredited provision before finally looking at assessment and accreditation as a mediating factor in the production of further benefits of learning.

The learners

During the first wave of interviews, only four of the fourteen learners participating in the research were working towards a qualification: Pippa was studying for a vocational qualification in Aromatherapy as well as taking part in an unaccredited Greek course; Tom was studying GCSE Spanish as well as learning French and Astronomy on unaccredited provision; Jan was taking an OCN level 1 qualification in computing; and Ted was undertaking accredited courses in both French and Shorthand. Of these four learners, only Pippa had been particularly motivated by the prospect of gaining a qualification, in order to broaden her current portfolio of academic qualifications with one which she perceived to be more practical and vocational. None of the other learners involved in the study referred to gaining a qualification as a motivation for learning.

Several months later when the second wave of interviews was being conducted, Pippa and John were still working towards their qualifications. Jan had successfully completed her OCN qualification at level 1 and because the college were not offering the OCN level 2 course to which she had been hoping to progress, she had enrolled on a level 2 computing course, working towards a college certificate. Ted had not continued with his shorthand because of a clash with other commitments but had

successfully gained his qualification in French. Ted was continuing to learn French, but was no longer enrolled at the college, instead choosing to study from home.

By the time the third wave of interviews took place, Pippa had finished her studies at the college and had progressed onto an accredited biodynamic massage course with another provider. Jan was no longer learning at the college due to a lack of suitable provision.

Alison had initially been enrolled on an unaccredited pottery course, but by her second interview was considering studying for a City and Guilds qualification. By the time of the third interview, Alison had begun, but then had to withdraw from this course for financial and health reasons.

Attitudes towards qualifications

This section explores learner attitudes towards assessment and accreditation and the value placed on gaining a qualification. It also examines how these attitudes and values impact upon the learners' decision to participate in accredited provision and thereby enjoy the benefits of this type of learning.

The value of qualifications

Having established whether learners were working towards a qualification as part of their current course, those enrolled on accredited provision were asked about the value of this qualification to them, while those on unaccredited provision were asked whether they would see any value in gaining a qualification for this learning if available. Analysis of the responses to this question produced three categories of response: a first group of learners identified that gaining a qualification from their learning would be of some value to them; a second said that gaining a qualification would be of no value to them at all; a third group expressed ambivalence to the idea of gaining a qualification.

A number of learners considered that gaining a qualification as a result of their learning would be valuable to them because of the use to which these qualifications could be put, including strengthening their CV, providing a

route to taking on wider responsibilities at work, gaining promotion or receiving increased remuneration within current employment. This group of learners (Group A), like Ted, tended to be younger, to be in or seeking employment, and to have a lower level of previous qualification.

“It could be used for a promotion or pay rise, or you can use it to make yourself more versatile in the company, so I think that’s when a qualification can be useful.” (Ted, wave 2)

A second group of learners expressed the view that gaining a qualification for their learning would be of no value to them. For most of the learners in this group, like Simon and Derek, this was because they could see no practical use to which they could put their qualification. This group of learners (Group B) tended to be older, to be approaching retirement or retired early, and to have a higher level of previous qualification.

“I’m not too bothered about getting a qualification myself... I’m not planning to use it formally so I don’t think I’d need certification” (Simon, wave 1)

“I don’t really care. It wouldn’t be constructive for me and I’m not doing it for anyone else’s benefit” (Derek, wave 1)

The third group of learners (Group C), like Brian and Mick, expressed ambivalence to the idea of gaining a qualification. As with the previous category, these learners were also unable to see an immediate use to which they could put a qualification, but their comments also reflected a sense that despite this, a qualification would be of some value for its own sake.

“It would be nice to have, but I don’t think it’s necessary because we’re not actually learning it to further our career.” (Brian, wave 1)

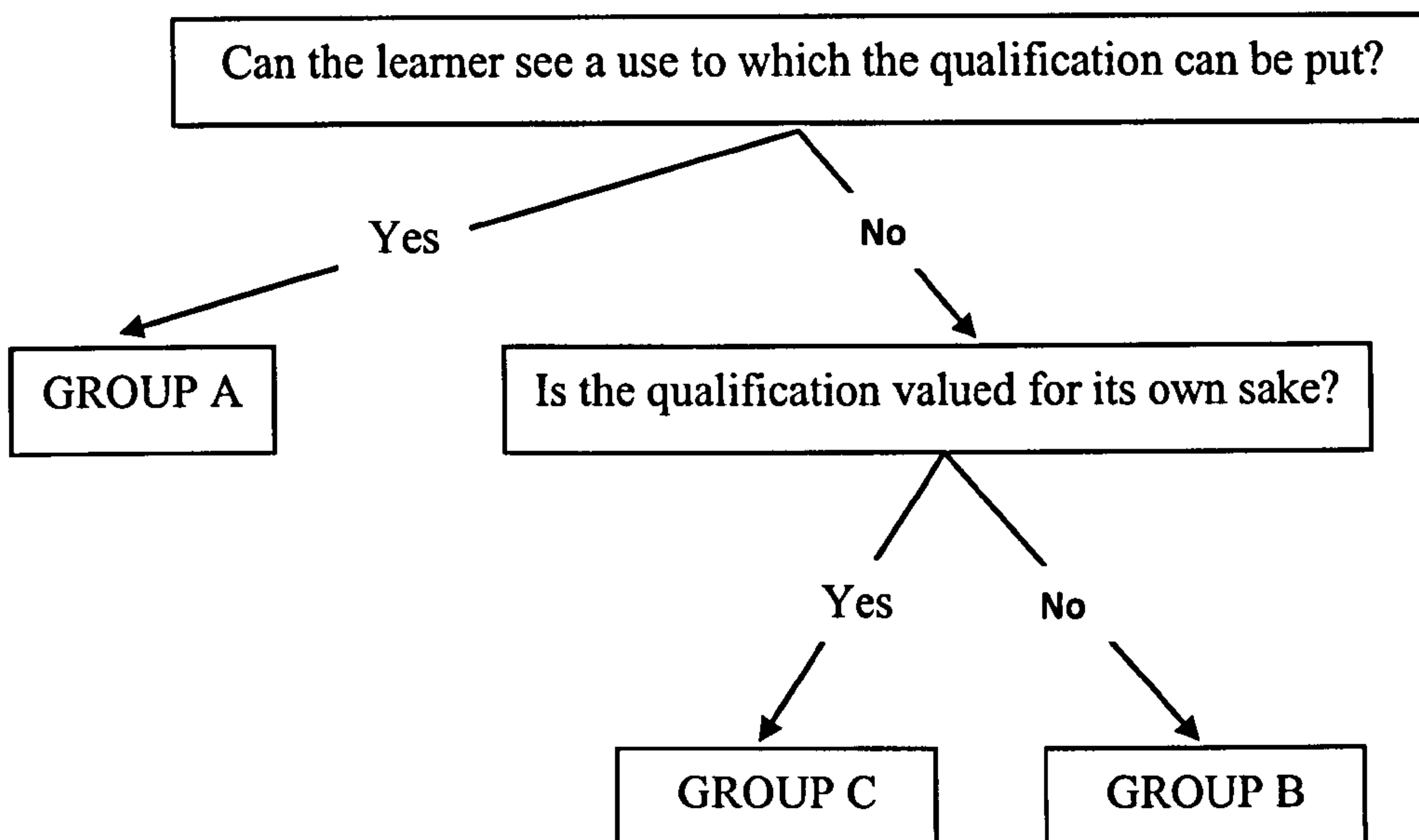
“I’m not bothered about a qualification, but it would be nice wouldn’t it.” (Mick, wave 1)

It was in Tom’s second interview, however, that an ambivalent attitude towards gaining a qualification came across most strongly. Tom was not personally motivated by gaining a qualification, but had enrolled on an accredited course in order to support his daughter. Just a few weeks away from the exam, Tom was caught between his feelings of not needing the qualification, but wanting to do well regardless out of a sense of pride.

“I think the piece of paper doesn’t really matter in the sense that the world is not going to stop turning if I don’t get it... It’s not critical in that sense, but I’m probably as nervous as the others for taking the exam. Not because I’m afraid for personal grounds. Call it pride if you like. There’s something that says try and do your best. But like I said, it won’t be the end of the world. I probably would be a bit disappointed.” (Tom, wave 2)

Although these categories are mutually exclusive they are also connected (see Figure 6.1). The difference between the first two categories, groups A and B, rests on whether learners could identify a way in which they might use such a qualification. If they were able to do this, then gaining a qualification was perceived as being valuable. If they could not, then the qualification was viewed as having no value. Learners in both groups B and C could not identify a use for a qualification from their current learning activity, however those in the latter category identified that there could still be some value in gaining a qualification for its own sake.

Figure 6.1: Categorising attitudes towards gaining a qualification



Choosing accreditation

As well as having different attitudes towards the value of gaining a qualification for their current learning activity, learners also differed in the choices they made, or indicated that they would make, in relation to choosing accredited provision. Most learners indicated that despite the perceived value, or lack of value, in gaining a qualification, the presence of accreditation had been only a secondary issue, if it had been an issue at all, when selecting their course. In contrast a small number of learners, who were goal-oriented (Houle, 1961), had deliberately chosen their course on the basis of whether or not their learning would be assessed, giving them opportunity to achieve a qualification.

A number of learners involved in my study, who had indicated that gaining a qualification would not be of value to them, were however, enrolled on accredited provision, or were considering enrolling on such provision in the coming year. Analysis of the data revealed two main reasons for this. Firstly, in order to support someone else for whom a qualification would be of value, and secondly because this was the only option available for the subject they wished to study.

In different ways, Tom and Judi were good examples of learners who were prepared to undertake an accredited course in order to support someone else. While Tom stated that he was not interested in gaining any more qualifications, he had enrolled on a GCSE Spanish course in order to support his daughter who had been required by her school to gain this qualification.

“Our daughter’s doing GCSE Spanish. She’s a French teacher. They wanted her to teach Spanish and she had no Spanish, so she did some beginners lessons last year, so it’s kind of moral support.” (Tom, wave 1)

Judi had also expressed a view that qualifications were not important to her, but during her second interview had indicated that she was considering taking a GCSE course in Greek. The group of learners on her unaccredited Greek course had been informed that the only way that they could continue to learn at the college would be through an accredited course, and in order to get sufficient numbers to make the course viable, all of the learners in her group would need to sign up for the qualification. Out of commitment to the group, for some of whom a qualification was perceived as valuable, Judi was intending to enrol on the course. During her third interview however, Judi explained that family commitments in recent months had prevented her from taking up the GCSE course, perhaps reflecting that her motivation for engaging on this particular accredited course was for the benefit of others rather than primarily for herself.

“I’d do it anyway. In talking to the younger people in the group, like the ones who are still working, for them it is probably quite important. They would like a qualification. So for that reason I carry on... for the group.” (Judi, wave 2)

This quote illustrates well the interconnectedness of building and drawing on social capital (Balatti and Falk, 2002). The group’s development from being a number of individual learners to becoming a unit that was prepared

to take collective action in the interests of its members (Healy et al., 2001) reflects the role of learning in building social capital. Their ability as a group to attempt to negotiate provision with the college and then to arrange their own private provision illustrates how they were then able to draw on this social capital.

For learners like Judi, where only an accredited course was on offer, most of the learners indicated that, circumstances permitting, they would be prepared to take the pragmatic option and enrol on this course. Mick, who was also studying Greek, was not bothered about getting a qualification but wanted to continue to develop his language skills and saw the accredited course as being the only way of doing this.

“The next step is probably GCSE. The only way we can do that [carry on learning Greek at the college] is by doing GCSE, because by doing that it’s accredited. And by doing Greek 2 or Greek 3 it wouldn’t be funded.” (Mick, wave 2)

In contrast to Judi and Mick, however, other learners said that even if accredited provision were the only option, then they would rather stop learning than enrol on that course. For Alison, this decision was connected to the practicalities associated with her poor health, while for Jo it was related to negative feelings about exams, based on previous experience.

“One of the reasons that I chose the two courses that I did was that I didn’t want to do any qualifications because my health is poor. I wanted to do courses where it didn’t matter if I showed up one week.” (Alison, wave 1)

“I am an exam freak. I just loathe and detest it. I just get into such a panic about it, even going to first aid exams. It totally ruins the learning experience for me to have to sit an exam at the end. I just wouldn’t do it.” (Jo, wave 1)

Even from this small group of adult learners, it is possible to see the complexity involved in an adults' decision of whether or not to engage in accreditation provision. While the extrinsic and intrinsic value of the qualification to the individual learner has some part to play, the availability of appropriate learning opportunities and previous educational experience, as well as wider factors external to the education system can also be key determinants of participation. As policy makers and providers grapple with the implications of this complexity, it is worth remembering that many learners within adult and community learning provision are activity or learning-oriented, and therefore the learning that takes place is far more important than any qualification that arises from it, and is therefore only a secondary issue in the decision to participate.

The benefits and disbenefits of participating on accredited provision

In order to examine the benefits of learning associated with assessment and accreditation, I had initially sought to identify learners' perceptions of the positive and negative outcomes of participating on accredited provision. It quickly became apparent, however, that this was not the most appropriate strategy for understanding the benefits and disbenefits of learning in this area. Instead, the message emerging from the data was that the existence of accreditation changes the nature of what happens during the learning experience in terms of content, pace and intensity, and focus. This is then viewed as being either positive or negative for different individuals with different motivations for learning and attitudes towards assessment and accreditation. This section explores each of these differences, and their implications for different learners, in more detail.

Firstly, courses that were accredited appeared to offer less flexibility in terms of the content covered during class time. On non-accredited provision, learners are more able to shape the content of their learning around their own interests, while the curriculum demands of an accredited course mean that much of the content is externally prescribed. For some learners, like Judi and Alison, this external prescription of content felt restrictive, taking away some of the freedom that can be found on unaccredited courses.

“And I feel that a GCSE course is more restrictive because you have to cover certain ground in a particular amount of time.” (Judi, wave 2)

“So you’re left to work at your own speed and on the projects that interest you rather than being tied to particular projects that she’s [the tutor] got set in stone. Because it’s not working towards any kind of qualification, then there’s that element of freedom in it.” (Alison, wave 1)

Tom, however, recognised that a set syllabus had meant that the class had been required to focus on additional aspects of the language than would have been the case for a conversational Spanish class. He also considered that his vocabulary and grasp of the technicalities of the language had developed more quickly as a result of being on an accredited course than they may have otherwise been the case.

“If there’s any value, I suppose it’s getting me to look at aspects of the language that if I just stayed in the conversation class I might not have noticed... Because the range of topics has been so great – home, work, education, environment. I’ve loved everything we’ve gone through. And I think what it has done, and it’s probably accelerated this, is actually obviously help me understand it.” (Tom, wave 2)

Secondly, the requirement to cover this curriculum in a particular time period also had an impact on the workload involved and thereby on the pace and intensity at which learners were expected to work. For example, the wider range of content to be covered in Tom’s course meant that the class were still learning new subjects only three weeks away from the exam.

“We’re about three weeks off the exam and we are still learning new topics – accidents and the vocabulary of accidents and I suppose next week we’ll do a bit more.”
(Tom, wave 2)

Learners responded differently to this intensity and pace of work. For Pippa, who identified herself as being a slow learner, the intensity and speed at which she was required to cover particular topics resulted in her feeling that she was not really gaining a firm grasp of the knowledge and skills that she was seeking to develop, even if she managed to hold onto it long enough to pass the exam.

“It’s very intense. It’s probably a lot more intensive than I thought it would be. A lot more in terms of the level of work that is required... I’m quite a slow learner and I’d like to spend a lot of time on something. I don’t really want to copy out some answers over a week and turn that in and it be done. It wouldn’t mean anything to me and I won’t hold on to any of that knowledge even if I manage to put it out during a test.” (Pippa, wave 2)

Both Mick and Simon, who were enrolled on non-accredited language courses, recognised that learning a language in this way was much less pressurised than if they had participated on an accredited course. For Mick, this lack of pressure was seen as being a positive element of the learning experience, while Simon expressed some frustration at the limited progress being made in the class.

“It’s really good right now because you can get as much or as little as you want out of it. You can do as much work as you want, or as little. It’s learning a language in a fun, non-pressurised way. A lot of people like that. I like that. I think it’s a brilliant way to learn a language.” (Mick, wave 2)

“The people who are taking the course do it voluntarily without any specific goal of getting a qualification, so usually they don’t do any homework they might get set or practise the things they have learnt.” (Simon, wave 1)

Simon went on to suggest that he would find an accredited course, which he characterised as being ‘more strict’, of greater use if his intention had been to be able to speak the language more fluently, rather than simply to gain a basic grasp of the language for family conversational purposes.

“I think if I was truly intent on getting my Chinese up to a standard where I could speak fluently then I would prefer a stricter course where you had to do certain exercises and you get feedback, and it’s handled in a stricter way.” (Simon, wave 1)

Thirdly, learners reported that accredited and non-accredited provision differed in their focus. While the focus of an unaccredited course could be upon a variety of personal learning goals, the focus on accredited courses was almost always on the assessment. Although he was enjoying learning a language on an unaccredited course, Mick could see how a focus on achieving a qualification would motivate him to learn more quickly.

“Going for a GCSE... you’d learn the language much quicker.” (Mick, wave 2)

In contrast, Tom felt that the focus on passing the exam was dominating the learning experience to the extent that he felt that he was learning simply in order to pass the exam rather than to develop his Spanish language skills. He explained that although he would like to continue learning Spanish next year, he would probably choose a level 2 conversation class in order to get practice of actually speaking the language.

“I feel now, if I’m good at anything, it will be good at doing the exam. We’ve got to do a 90 second presentation

and then answer questions on it. You're learning it by heart... It's almost rote learning." (Tom, wave 2)

To summarise, learners perceived that the presence, or otherwise, of accreditation as part of their course impacted upon their ability to learn, by influencing the nature of their provision in terms of its content, its pace and intensity, and its focus. One of the underpinning assumptions of the concept of andragogy is that adults are more self-directed in their learning than children, however as this section has illustrated, the impact of assessment and accreditation on the learning experience is such that the potential for autonomous, self-directed learning can be severely reduced (Hanson, 1996).

For some learners, the presence of accreditation was seen as having a positive impact upon their learning, while for others the impact was negative. A number of learners also reported that these differences impacted upon their enjoyment of the course. For example, the pace at which Tom's accredited course was running, alongside the workload and exam pressure involved was starting to affect how much he was enjoying learning Spanish.

"It's all sort of piling up now so to that extent it's less enjoyable... It's constantly in your mind and it comes to be not so enjoyable... Yes I think the enjoyment might be going downhill at the moment because of the exam pressure." (Tom, wave 2)

Commenting on whether he would take an accredited course in another subject he concluded that it was not worth 'punishing' himself and asserted that he would not put himself through the same experience again. Alison echoed Tom's point from a different perspective by contrasting doing a qualification with having fun.

"The Jazz and Blues. It's not for a qualification. It's for fun." (Alison, wave 1)

Although most of the learners involved in my study were not interested in gaining a qualification, many felt that they would be prepared to enrol on an accredited course if this were the only option available to them. As a result, the move away from the provision of unaccredited to accredited provision, as seen in recent years, would not necessarily result in these learners choosing not to participate. However, this may begin to happen if the disbenefits or ‘anticipated pain’ (Knowles, 1996) associated with accreditation start to outweigh some of the benefits of the learning. Where this is the case, then we are likely to see considerable numbers of learners leaving the system.

Assessment and accreditation as a mediating factor

As well as examining the benefits and disbenefits of participating on courses that involve an element of assessment and accreditation, several respondents also mentioned the benefits that enjoyed as a result of gaining their qualification. In this sense, the qualification can be seen as being an intermediate benefit or a mediating factor in the production of further or wider benefits.

In contrast to Knowles assertion that “nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult; it is the ultimate sign of disrespect and dependency” (Knowles, 1996: 88), analysis of the data indicated that gaining a qualification was a mediating factor in the production of three categories of benefit: the development of a sense of pride and achievement, recognition by others for the learning taken place, and progression to further opportunities. This section explores each of these categories in turn, and the relationship between them.

None of the learners interviewed made reference to any disbenefits experienced as a result of gaining a qualification. It would be difficult to identify what such disbenefits might be, although it is conceivable that learners may consider it a disbenefit to gain a qualification at a lower grade than expected or needed.

A number of learners made reference to the sense of pride and achievement that results from having their learning recognised through the awarding of a qualification. While Jan talked about the impact that this had on her self-esteem, Ted mentioned how proud he was of himself, and Tom described being encouraged by a sense of achievement.

“I suppose it does something for my self esteem to think, well yes you do get something at the end... I like the idea of producing a portfolio of work for somebody to look through. That gives me satisfaction.” (Jan, wave 2)

“I wouldn’t be able to use it towards any advantage for anything else on top of me being proud of myself for doing in.” (Ted, wave 2)

“In each bit you get a sense of achievement and its just kind of encourages you.” (Tom, wave 2)

A number of learners also made reference to the role that gaining a qualification plays in obtaining recognition from others for the learning that has taken place. While for Jan, Ted and Tom, the concept of self esteem was one of individual psychology, for this second group, their increased self esteem can be seen as more of a social product (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). Pippa’s description of a qualification being an external proof resonated with a number of learners.

“It’s kind of proof externally that you can do the thing that you say you can do... it gives it that bit more validity I think.” (Pippa, wave 2)

Jan made particular reference to the recognition given to her learning by the awarding body. She commented on the value to her of having someone else approve the learning she had done, and also speculated that such recognition might also be seen as valuable to the tutor and the college.

“It’s peanuts really, but its something to work towards at the end of the course. It’s nice to feel you have completed a piece of work. You’ve handed in your workbook and somebody else is going to look at it and say ‘yes, this reaches the standard we expect’ or not... It was very nice this term when I was able to pick up my certificate.” (Jan, wave 1)

Bernard, also valued the recognition of learning that accreditation provides, although for him this was more about the recognition he would receive from the wider community, rather than from an awarding body.

“It boosts the ego doesn’t it? Makes you feel that you have something recognised in the community.” (Bernard, wave 1)

Thirdly, a number of learners made reference to the value of qualifications in opening up opportunities for progression in education or employment. Alison had been learning pottery for a number of years and was now thinking about doing a City and Guilds accredited course. Although she was going to begin at level one, she anticipated progressing on to higher levels.

“I can’t see me ever stopping now I’ve started. I don’t know where that will take me – whether it will take me up to level 3 City and Guilds, or going on to do a ceramics degree.” (Alison, wave 2)

Naomi also envisaged that the GCSE in Greek that she was hoping to enrol on could lead to higher qualifications, as well to developments in her career. Although she had not voiced this aspiration when she had first started to learn Greek, her success in learning the language and the subsequent opportunities to study for a qualification in the subject had prompted her to think in this way.

“Say I started from GCSE and went up to A-level, and then I’d probably go to further education to get a degree or something, and then I’d be able to switch my career into something like that you know. I’m looking for a career change as well. That’s why.” (Naomi, wave 1)

Naomi, more than any other learner in my study, felt that gaining a qualification would open up opportunities for her future. By gaining a good grade GCSE, Naomi would then possess 5 GCSE grades A-C, seen as a minimum standard for employability by government, and often a key requirement for new staff by employers.

“It will bring my GCSE grades up to 5 and I’m hoping that I’ll probably get higher than a C. That’s what most employers ask for. Having 5 GCSEs graded C and above. Although I’ve got a permanent job anyway, if I do decide to leave then I’ve got the 5 GCSEs.” (Naomi, wave 2)

The above categories of learning benefit are strongly linked. For many learners, the recognition and validation of learning that gaining a qualification provides, simultaneously produces a sense of personal pride and satisfaction as well as indicating to others the value of the learning that has taken place. These two factors often then combine together to open up opportunities for progression. An issue of key importance here, identified by several learners, is that in order to deliver these benefits, qualifications must be seen as being recognisable, credible and valuable by others. This issue can be illustrated by the following comment made by Bernard.

“Because if you say ‘I’ve got an OCN qualification’ people usually follow with ‘Oh, what really?’ because they haven’t got a clue. But if you say ‘A-level’, they adjust their posture and it’s better at a party isn’t it?” (Bernard, wave 1)

Although intended to be humorous, it makes a serious point that different qualifications, both in terms of level and awarding body, have different currency. If learners are to use qualifications gained as a result of their learning to enjoy further benefits of learning, then policy makers and providers need to think carefully about what is made available.

Summarising conclusions

Although education policy often reduces the benefits of achieving a qualification to a simplistic causal relationship between the highest level of qualification achieved and a range of economic variables, the data on assessment and accreditation collected from these interviews illustrates that the issues, particularly at an individual level, are much more complex.

Adult learners possess a range of attitudes with regards to working towards a qualification, based on their perceptions of both the use to which they would be able to put the qualification and the extent to which they value qualifications for their own sake. In addition, learners also differ in the choices that they make in relation to choosing to enrol on accredited provision. While some learners deliberately choose their course on the basis of whether or not it is accredited, for many adults the presence of accreditation is only a secondary issue, if at all, in selecting a course, with the learning that takes place often considered more important than the qualification that might arise from it. Other factors such as the availability of appropriate learning opportunities and the learners' previous educational experience, as well as factors external to the education system also play a key part in an adults' decision to participate.

The data also suggest that rather than being able to simply identify a list of positive or negative outcomes of participating on accredited provision, the existence of assessment and accreditation within a course, impacts upon an adult's ability to learn, by influencing the nature of their provision in terms of its content, its pace and intensity, and its focus. For some learners, the presence of this assessment and accreditation has a positive impact upon their learning, while for others the impact is negative. Although most of the learners involved in my study were not particularly interested in the

prospect of gaining a qualification, many felt that they would be prepared to enrol on an accredited course if this were the only option available to them.

While gaining a qualification can be perceived as being a benefit of learning in its own right, the data also demonstrate that it can be viewed as a mediating factor in the production of further benefits, for example in developing a sense of pride and achievement, in securing recognition by others for the learning taken place, and in opening up progression routes to further opportunities. For each of these to be realised, learners considered it important that any qualification on offer should be recognisable, credible and valued by others, a key challenge for government as it reviews the national qualifications framework.

7. Data: working lives

This chapter presents an analysis of the data on the complex relationships between participation in learning and working lives. The data clearly show that participation in adult and community learning provision can have a beneficial impact upon working lives in ways that extend beyond narrowly focussed definitions of employment, income and productivity. Not only can it bring benefits to the nature and quality of working lives, but it is also true that work can impact upon the learning experience thereby acting as a mediating factor in the production of wider and further benefits. As illustrated by the learners interviewed, these complex relationships have potential for negative, as well as positive effects.

The chapter begins with a description of the learners from whom the data are taken, in relation to this issue, before going on to look at the benefits of learning in relation to working lives, and the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits. Finally the chapter examines how working lives act as a mediating factor in the production of further benefits of learning.

The learners

Although all of the learners involved in my study were of working age, only six were engaged in paid employment during the period in which the interviews were undertaken. Five learners – Pippa, Simon, Mick, Naomi and Anne – were in full time employment, while Brian was working part time.

A further six learners – Derek, Tom, Judi, Jo, Jan and Bernard – were all retired, although still of working age. Jan had been retired on grounds of ill health, while all of the others learners had chosen to take early retirement. Finally, Alison, still a young woman in her thirties, was claiming incapacity benefit and unable to work, and Ted had recently been made redundant and was now registered unemployed.

Ted was the only learner involved in my study for whom their employment status changed during the series of interviews. Between the first and second interviews, he was able to pick up some temporary work. This provided him

with some financial independence, while being sufficiently flexible to enable him to continue learning and to attend interviews for more permanent work.

The benefits of learning

This section explores the beneficial impact of learning upon working lives and draws on data provided by eight learners who were either employed or claiming benefits, and a further two learners who were engaged in voluntary activity. Most of these learners were enrolled on courses that appeared to have little direct relationship with the work in which they were engaged, although Ted had specifically chosen courses to support his future employability and Brian was learning a language with the intention of putting it to use within his voluntary work. Despite this, all of these learners were able to identify benefits to their working lives as a result of their learning. Analysis of the data indicates that learning can play a key role in supporting adults in their current and future employment, in making and saving money, and in engaging in voluntary activity. Each of these five categories is explored in more detail below.

Current employment

None of the six learners in my study, who were in paid employment, were engaged in learning associated with their work. As a result, four of them stated that their learning had no impact on their current work. For Simon and Pippa however, their learning was proving to have a beneficial impact upon their work in three different ways, firstly through using the skills and knowledge developed on the course back in the workplace, secondly through supporting the creation of a healthy work-life balance and thirdly through generating greater energy and enthusiasm for work.

Simon, whose wife originated from Hong Kong, was learning Mandarin in order to better communicate with his wife's family. Unexpectedly, however, his developing language skills and understanding of the Chinese culture was proving to be useful when interacting with Chinese students at the university in which he worked.

"I can communicate and talk to Chinese students at the university also. I am supervising a project by a student from Singapore, so I can communicate with her. The course is good because you also learn about the culture and what Chinese people do and what they consider polite and impolite etc. which helps when dealing with Chinese students." (Simon, wave 1)

Pippa had enrolled on two courses – Aromatherapy and Greek – in order to help develop a healthy work-life balance. She found that her learning was able to provide her with greater energy and enthusiasm for her paid work.

"I quite like the structured learning that courses can give and I find that it can kind of sometimes reinvigorate the energy that I have in relation to my paid work... It does help with that energy lift if I can focus on something different. For that time it can actually completely change my mood or my sense of head space." (Pippa, wave 1)

While at first glance, it would appear that the non-vocational nature of both Simon and Pippa's learning should mean that there would be little or no benefit to their working lives, this was not the case. For Simon, the beneficial impact of learning upon his work was a result of the unanticipated use to which he was able to put the skills he had developed, while for Pippa it was the process of learning that was beneficial, as well as a focus on a completely different subject to that engaged with in the workplace. It may be possible therefore, that the responses given by other learners, that their learning had no impact on their current work, reflects a too narrow view of the potential impact that learning might have on paid work, and that with greater reflection, or at a later stage in their learning, other respondents too may have been able to identify such benefits.

Future employment

Although most learners were unable to identify any benefits of learning to their current employment, five learners – Pippa, Ted, Mick, Naomi and Ann

– each spoke about the beneficial impact that they expected their learning to have upon future employment opportunities. Through my analysis of the data, I was able to identify three ways in which learning was expected to have this beneficial impact; through the skills and knowledge gained from learning; through the qualifications attained for this learning; and through increased confidence arising from successful learning.

Anne was planning to move to Greece with her husband, and saw the development of Greek language skills as key in enabling her to find part time employment. Mick too, could see that his Greek language skills could be used in future employment, although unlike Anne, at this stage his ambitions were of such a tentative nature that he had no plans to take his career in this direction.

“I'd like to try and get some sort of work over there... You've really got to have some sort of Greek, because that's the biggest problem, when people go and live abroad, the language barrier.” (Anne, wave 2)

“I've got this fairytale in my head that I'd quite like to live in Greece and work somewhere in Greece and learning Greek would be a massive help. Or even to work with Greeks in this country in some capacity.” (Mick, wave 1)

Having recently been made redundant, Ted embarked on his learning with a view to developing skills and knowledge that would increase his employability. He chose to enrol on courses in French, shorthand and bookkeeping in order to develop skills and knowledge that would support him to find a new job in his previous line of employment, as well as to enable him to try out new types of work, or to start his own business.

“The first reason why I decided to learn French was to increase my employability. I have worked in retail all my life, and shorthand isn't really necessary, but sometimes languages are useful I chose book-keeping as well because

I have always thought that I would like to have my own business... Back to the shorthand, I think if I decided to do anything with reporting, which I might in the future I'd have an advantage because some reporters use shorthand and take notes very quickly. " (Ted, wave 2)

As Pippa progressed through her initial Aromatherapy massage course, her perspective began to be transformed from one whereby aromatherapy could be a welcome balance to her working life, to one whereby it could be integrated into it, as she began to see that the skills she was developing could become utilised as an additional source of income. Several months before her third interview, she had enrolled on a further course to study biodynamic massage, and was actively considering how she might combine her current employment with future activity.

"We have started to talk about how we would use it. I'm still stepping up my practice, increasing that more. I'll probably do some checking out the basics of everything – how much it costs to rent a room, that kind of thing... I'd probably have to look at that [combining full time employment with developing her own business], yeah. And then look at perhaps flexible working, compact hours or reduced hours. " (Pippa, wave 3)

For Naomi, the prospect of getting a qualification for her learning was extremely attractive; as it would mean that she would then have the five GCSEs required by some employers as their minimum employment criteria.

"That's what most employers ask for. Having 5 GCSE grades C and above. Although I've got a permanent job anyway, if I do decide to leave I've got the 5 GCSEs. It may not be in a relevant subject, but its still 5 GCSEs. " (Naomi, wave 2)

Naomi had also recognised that once she had gained a GSCE, it would be possible to progress to higher-level qualifications, which in turn could open up further employment opportunities, including the possibility of completely changing careers.

"Say if it started from GSCE and went up to A-level, and then I'd probably do something like go to further education to get a degree or something. Then I'd be able to switch my career into something like that you know. I'm looking for a career change as well." (Naomi, wave 1)

Ted, who was enrolled on accredited courses in French and shorthand, anticipated that the qualifications he was expecting to gain could be beneficial in his future workplace in demonstrating his value and versatility, thus acting as a level for promotion or a pay rise. He also, however recognised the potential benefit that his increased level of confidence could provide to his working life. Speaking about a developing enthusiasm to try new things, Ted explained:

"It's given me the confidence to do what I've always been reluctant to do." (Ted, wave 2)

By way of illustration, Ted discussed how he has begun to look for jobs in France and Switzerland, and how, in interview situations, he has drawn on his experience of learning, to demonstrate his commitment to personal development.

Of the learners above, only Anne and Ted had specially enrolled on their course with a view to enhancing their future employment prospects. However, as learners began to develop their skills and knowledge, and to anticipate the value of the qualifications they would obtain, and the confidence that was being built, they were able to reflect upon potential opportunities that were available to them and adjust their perspectives around the relationship between their learning and work, illustrating how benefits of learning develop over time. Throughout the relatively short

lifetime of my study, it was not possible to identify whether these anticipated benefits were realised, with potential benefits evolving into actual ones. When I tried to contact Naomi to take part in a third interview however, I was informed that she had gained a job with an airline company and moved on.

Making money

Two learners, Pippa and Alison, referred to ways in which the skills they had developed through their learning had the potential to provide them with an additional source of income, even if it did not lead to a change in employment.

Shortly after enrolling on her aromatherapy massage course, Pippa had begun to try out her new skills on friends and family. As her skills developed, she anticipated that she might begin to feel more comfortable about charging for her services.

“At the moment I feel a bit cheeky about what the college is charging. They started booking clients and charging £14, which the college then takes, and I feel sort of uncomfortable about that... I don't feel ready to charge friends yet. But maybe yes, I could see in another few, maybe four or five, months that I will be competent to do that as a way to kind of not only recoup the costs but perhaps have a little side earner”. (Pippa, wave 2)

By the time of her third interview, Alison's pottery skills had developed to the point whereby she felt comfortable with the idea of selling her work. Although her long term health condition was such that she would be unlikely to be able to return to paid employment, or to produce pottery on a large scale, she had considered the idea of placing her work in a small gallery in her home town that sold work on behalf of local artists.

“It's a kind of co-operative where artists can sell their products and the shop just takes a slice off the top. They

don't shell anything out, they just put it in there and you get a certain proportion of the money back and they take the rest of it. So it's risk free for them and you get a venue to display your work, even if you've only got a couple of pieces. I was definitely thinking of doing that as a next step after I'd finished my City and Guilds." (Alison, wave 3)

For both learners, this potential benefit of learning was mediated by the development of skills and knowledge as a result of their learning. For Pippa this would involve the provision of a service, while for Alison, the production of goods for sale.

"Even if it's just a way of paying for my hobby, even if I just sell enough to cover the cost of my kiln firings that would be nice." (Alison, wave 2)

A further difference between the two learners was in their perception of this additional income. While Pippa saw the use of her new skills as perhaps being a 'side earner', which could supplement her main income. Alison viewed any income earned from selling her pottery simply as a way of paying for her hobby.

Saving money

As well as being a source of income generation, the literature (McGivney, 1994) shows that for some learners, the skills gained as a result of their participation in learning can be used to generate cost savings, that is they become able to make, refurbish or repair items for themselves, that would otherwise have cost them more to purchase these goods and services from others. Within my study, only Alison was participating in learning that developed such practical and creative skills. When asked about the use to which she had been able to put these skills, she spoke about using them to make items for her own home and to pass on to others as gifts.

"I made a house number plates and my mom wants one for her house. Just things like that. Cheap gifts, which is a good thing on a limited budget, when you don't work."
(Alison, wave 3)

For Alison, living on the limited income provided by Incapacity Benefit, the ability to save money on gifts was seen as being of considerable value.

Voluntary activity

Three of the learners interviewed reported that the learning in which they were engaged had had a positive impact upon their voluntary activity. This beneficial impact was mediated in three ways; through the development of skills and knowledge, through the mental stimulation provided by learning, and through increased self-esteem resulting from learning.

Along with his wife, Brian had enrolled on an Intermediate Mandarin Chinese course to develop his language skills in order to better communicate with Chinese students who may be interested in finding out more about the Bible. Brian had already been involved with the Jehovah's Witnesses for a number of years before engaging in this learning, and had taken it up on the suggestion of the organisation.

"We are Jehovah's Witnesses and part of our work is teaching people about the Bible. We were asked as a couple if we would think about trying to help Chinese people, because there is not much understanding or appreciation of the Bible in China. So we were asked if we would try and learn the language so that we could help Chinese students that come over here and who might have an interest in the Bible." (Brian, wave 1)

Bernard too was involved in voluntary work before he engaged on his Italian course at the college. Although this had not been the stimulus for his engagement, he was able to identify the beneficial impact that learning had made to his role on the management committee. Unlike Bernard, the benefit

of his learning arose not from the language skills that he was developing, but from the mental stimulation that the learning provided him with as well as the practice that it gave him at group speaking.

“It makes other things perhaps easier to deal with. For example, a couple of weeks ago I was in an Italian class in the morning. I felt fairly stimulated by that. And I know in the evening I had to chair a meeting. If you are chairing a meeting there are one or two little anxieties, but I went to this meeting feeling “wow, if I can understand and use some of that grammar effectively, this group of reprobates won’t stand a chance.” It also gives you practice, it keeps you practised in speaking to a group.” (Bernard, wave 1)

In contrast, Jan’s voluntary work at the Records Office began between the second and third interview waves. She had had a long-standing interest in the work of the Records Office and had once thought about pursuing a career in the museum service. While it was a change in her circumstances that acted as a trigger to begin volunteering, the learning that she had engaged in challenged the perspective she had of herself, developing her self-esteem as well as her skills to enable her to be more effective in this role.

“I needed to do the computer skills first. Not to go and work in the records office, but because I needed to do that for my own self esteem, to feel that I wasn’t being left behind by everybody... Because I was a carer I only had a limited amount of time, so for me the priority was to actually go and get the computer training. In fact really it’s the right way round because it’s made me more able to appreciate the sort of things I’m having to do at the Records Office.” (Jan, wave 3)

All three learners were able to identify the benefits of learning upon their voluntary activity, although only Brian had enrolled with the expressed

intention of supporting this activity. Bernard too was already engaged in voluntary work before he began his learning. The benefits he experienced were entirely unanticipated, although no less valuable for this. While it would be too much to claim that Jan engaged in her voluntary work as a result of her learning, it is evident that her learning supported her to undertake this role in a more effective and confident manner.

To summarise, learning can play a key role in supporting adults in the development of their current and future employment, whether paid or unpaid, and in generating additional income or making cost savings. These benefits are often mediated through the development of skills and knowledge, but also through a range of other factors including through providing mental stimulation, through generating greater energy and enthusiasm for work, through contributing to a healthy work-life balance, through the use of qualifications attained for learning and through increased confidence arising from successful learning.

Working lives as a mediating factor

As well as identifying the benefits of participation in adult and community learning on the working lives of the learners involved in my study, data collected from the interviews clearly showed that the work in which learners were engaged also had an impact upon their learning, thereby acting as a mediating factor in the production of further benefits.

Analysis of these data indicated that the work in which learners were, or had been, engaged in had the potential to make either a positive or negative impact upon their learning. Learners reported that their work could be a hindrance to their learning in two main ways; firstly by restricting the time available for learning and secondly by restricting the mental energy available for learning. However, it was also evident that their work was able to support learning, by providing support from colleagues and employers, and through the transfer of workplace skills to the learning environment. This section explores each of these categories in turn, and the relationship between them.

Firstly, a number of learners, who were working, commented that they found it difficult to make time for learning alongside their work commitments. Mick reflected that when learning and employment commitments conflict then work must take priority. In contrast a number of retired learners suggested that they found learning much easier now that they had more time available. When asked about the difference between learning while employed and learning in retirement, Derek described how he was now able to invest more time in his learning, without making such sacrifices in other areas of life.

"I've not had much time to practise as I've said, which is my fault really because it's all about time management isn't it? But if I've got stuff to do for work that's obviously got to take priority." (Mick, wave 1)

"I put more time in outside the class, which is helpful for the characters. But then again I always thought I would do that if I had the opportunity. I'm not making much sacrifice of time now. While I was at work it was a bit more awkward." (Derek, wave 1)

For a small number of learners, their time for learning was restricted by shift patterns clashing with the course timetable. For Ted, this meant that for a number of years he had chosen not to enrol on courses, rather than missing sessions and falling behind.

"Most of the jobs I had in retail made it impossible to do this type of course. I never had a 9-5 job. My jobs were either 2-10 or sometimes three twelve-hour days and then I would be off for 3 days. So if I'm doing a course some of the days might fall on days when I was working and therefore I was unable to do it and I didn't want it to be off and on. About four years ago I came to apply for a course but I couldn't do it because my job didn't allow me at that time." (Ted, wave 1)

Secondly, a number of learners in employment referred to being too tired to learn effectively, while those who were retired identified that they now had more mental energy for their learning. Bernard reported that now he was retired his mind was much fresher and he was therefore making much better progress in learning Italian.

“It’s much harder to do these sorts of courses if you are in a full-time job because your mind is so cluttered up with whatever you do in the day. It’s far more complicated to get to grips with something as complicated as grammar in the evenings, but without a full-time job my mind is much fresher, so I was able to make more progress.” (Bernard, wave 1)

In contrast, Denise’s shift work not only restricted the time available to learn, but also meant that when she did get round to her studies, she was often too tired to concentrate. This affected not only her performance, but also her motivation to attend classes.

“Because I work weekends as well, so the only time I can take it and do it is on my night shift, but on the night shift you are too tired to sit there... If I’m on a night shift I take my work with me, but then after looking after so many patients, it’s hard to concentrate when you know you’ve got to go in and get up and look after patients... and sometimes like when I’ve gotten home, I’m so tired I really, really can’t be bothered to go.” (Denise, wave 1)

In relation to the positive impact that work was able to have upon learning, firstly a number of employed learners made reference to the support and encouragement that they received from their colleagues for their learning. Simon had wanted to learn Chinese for a while but had only got round to it when other colleagues informed him about the course and all enrolled together.

“I kept on saying I’d start learning Chinese but never did it. Now I have colleagues who wanted to learn, I finally got round to it.” (Simon, wave 1)

Pippa enrolled on her biodynamic massage course independently from work, but had been encouraged by the positive feedback she received from colleagues after attending the first residential course.

“I came back from that first weekend and everyone here [at work] was commenting that I actually looked like I’d had a wonderful weekend somewhere, that I was in love and I was glowing.” (Pippa, wave 3)

Secondly, a few of the learners interviewed spoke about how the skills that they had developed through their work, were proving to be useful when transferred to the learning environment. Judi spoke about being able to use the inquiry skills developed as a researcher to engage with a new subject area, while Jan explained how her experience of teaching children whose mother tongue was not English, enabled her to support a fellow learner of Indian origin.

“I had worked with children whose home language wasn’t English and so I was thinking what are the things she is going to find difficult. I was having to draw back some years ago to tease out how I could help her to see what she’d got to do... I want to share what I know. I think that’s the teacher side of me coming out.” (Jan, wave 1)

To summarise, in addition to learning generating benefits to working lives, the work in which an adult is engaged can itself act as a mediating factor in the impact of learning upon their wider lives. The restrictions that work can place on the time and mental energy available for learning can reduce or negate potential benefits, while the support available from colleagues and

employers, and the transferability of skills from the workplace into the learning environment can enhance the development of such benefits.

Summarising conclusions

Although within government policy there is a tendency to create a distinction between learning for work and learning for personal development or pleasure, the data collected through these interviews illustrate that the vocational/non-vocational divide is an artificial one. Instead, they suggest that a complex set of relationships exist between participation in learning and working lives that permeate these boundaries. This is perhaps unsurprising when we remember that, despite the separation of these two arenas in policy, learners are whole people for whom the skills, knowledge and other benefits of learning gained in one arena, can and often are, transferred between the two.

The data clearly demonstrate that participation in adult and community learning provision, typically thought of as being non-vocational, can have a beneficial impact upon working lives in a number of ways that extend beyond narrowly focused definitions of employment, income and productivity. Learning has a key role to play in the development of both current and future employment opportunities, whether paid or voluntary. A number of learners also identified ways in which their learning could be used to generate additional income, as well as to make cost savings. These benefits are not to be underestimated, especially in the current economic climate, and among those sections of the adult population living in relative poverty.

While illustrating how participation in learning can benefit both the nature and quality of working lives, the data also show how work itself can act as a mediating factor in the development of further outcomes, presenting both opportunities and barriers (Cross, 1981), therefore having potential for both negative, as well as positive effects. On one hand, the demands that work places on an individual in terms of time and energy, necessarily impacts upon their ability to commit to additional activities thereby reducing or negating potential benefits. On the other hand, the availability of resources

such as support from colleagues and employers, and the transferability of skills from the workplace into the learning environment can enhance the development of such benefits.

8. Data: supporting and stimulating transition

The dramatic rate of change involved in many aspects of modern life, accompanied by the changing nature of work, of family life, and the increase in both external and internal migration means that in Britain today adults can face an unprecedented range of transitions, often without any formal guidance or support. For some adults, this transition may be a result of their own informed choice, while for others transition can be forced by pressure points in their lives.

The category of supporting and stimulating transition was identified through my analysis of the data from the first wave of interviews as being additional to the ten categories of benefit identified by Schuller et al (2002). Although life transitions and transformation are a feature of the literature on participation in learning (Mezirow, 1978; Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980; Cross, 1981; McGivney, 1993; Sargant and Aldridge, 2002), little of the literature on the benefits of learning addresses this particular benefit, perhaps because many of the studies in this field of research do not include a longitudinal element, and those that do are predominantly of a quantitative nature and therefore not easily able to explore the issues and processes involved in any depth.

This chapter presents an analysis of the data around the theme of transition, exploring the role that learning has played in supporting, and in some cases stimulating, transition in the lives of the learners involved in my study. The chapter begins with a description of the learners from whom the data are taken. It then looks, in turn, at the changes experienced by these learners in three key areas – the location in which they live, their health, and their work. For each area of transition, the chapter looks at the role that learning has played, and at the mediating factors involved in these processes.

The learners

Over the period during which interviews were undertaken, all but five of the learners interviewed were engaged in some form of personal transition. This transition fell into three categories associated with location, health and employment. A fourth potential category of transition that I looked for

within the data was associated with relationships e.g. births, deaths, marriages, divorce, children etc. None of the learners involved in my study, however, indicated that they had experienced any such transition over the period in which they were interviewed, and it may be of interest to explore this additional area of transition through further research. Two of the learners indicated that one of their parents had died between the second and third interview, although this did not appear to result in a significant period of transition for them. With a different group of learners, however, it is possible this could be an important category of transition. Tom, for example, spoke of a widowed learner in one of his classes, for whom learning was seen to be playing a key part in rebuilding his life following the death of his wife.

“There’s one chap in the class who’s a widower. He’s widowed. He was on the Lille trip, and he was saying it took a long time for him to get help. He’s invited us to go back to his house. He’s involved in all sorts of things. He’s been in the class about 4 years, but you know, he’s obviously very supported by people like that, and without that who knows what might have happened to him. His confidence took a knock when his wife died and he just found it very difficult... I think it’s harder for men to actually go out and mix in a mixed group.” (Tom, wave 2)

For five of the learners within my study, their transition related to a change in location. Pippa, Judi, Tom and Jo had all recently moved into the city. For Jo this move was on a temporary part-time basis while her husband worked in the city during the week. For the others the move was more permanent. In addition, Anne, who had grown up in city was anticipating moving to Greece with her husband.

For Jan and Alison, their transition related to adjusting to the changing circumstances brought about by the development of poor health. Both had been forced to leave employment as a result of health difficulties, and at the time of the first interview, were seeking to adjust to their new lifestyle as

well as manage their condition. Between the second and third interviews in particular, Alison continued to experience a significant decline in her health.

Much of the transition in learners' lives was associated with work. Judi, Tom and Jan had all recently retired. For Judi and Tom this had been of their own choosing, while for Jan, had been forced due to ill health. Alison had not long moved from full time employment to living on incapacity benefit and Ted had become unemployed.

At the time of the first interview, only Pippa had recently taken up a new job, although aspirations to develop or change their career became evident among a number of learners as the interviews unfolded. Ted was seeking to gain employment or become self-employed, and Pippa, Alison and Naomi all expressed an interest in developing or changing their careers.

As well as being able to categorise the transition into those associated with location, health and employment, it was also possible to look at the data in terms of whether the transition was chosen or forced, whether it was actual or anticipated, and whether the transition had been the trigger for engaging in learning, or whether learning was the trigger for the transition (see Table 8.1). For some learners, such as Pippa, Ted and Alison, a transition triggered participation in their current learning activity, which then served to trigger further, usually anticipated, transition. As illustrated in Table 8.1 below, the nature of the transition experienced by learners involved in my study varied in a number of ways, with each of these variables impacting upon the benefits of learning and mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits.

Table 8.1: Transition in learners' lives

Pippa	Move into the city	Location	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
	New Job	Work	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Change of career of working pattern	Work	Chosen	Anticipated	Triggered by learning
Judi	Move into the city	Location	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Retirement	Work	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
Tom	Move into the city	Location	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Retirement	Work	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
Ted	Unemployment	Work	Forced	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Seeking employment or self employment	Work	Chosen	Anticipated	Triggered by learning
Jo	Move into the city	Location	Chosen	Actual	Trigger for learning
Jan	Poor health	Health	Forced	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Retirement	Work	Forced	Actual	Trigger for learning
Alison	Poor and declining health	Health	Forced	Actual	Trigger for learning
	Self employment in new area	Work	Chosen	Anticipated	Triggered by learning
Naomi	Career development or new career	Work	Chosen	Anticipated	Triggered by learning
Anne	Move to Greece	Location	Chosen	Anticipated	Trigger for learning

Changing location

This section explores the role of learning in supporting and stimulating transition in relation to changing location. It draws on data provided by four learners who have all recently moved into the city from other parts of the UK and one learner who is anticipating moving overseas to Greece in the near future. For all of these six learners, the transition was chosen and acted as a trigger for the learning in which they are currently engaged.

Moving in

For those learners who had recently moved into the City, a significant benefit of their participation was the role of learning in assisting them to settle into their new home. Judi, Tom, Pippa and Jo had all enrolled on courses at the college with this aim in mind, envisaging that participation in formal learning would help them to do two things: to become familiar with their new location and to meet and interact with new people. As Pippa explained in her first interview, for her, these two mediating factors

combined to provide her with a sense of belonging, of being rooted and established.

"I think it did definitely help me attach more to [the city] and establish more, because it kind of introduces you to places and people that you didn't know before and that kind of root to the local thing." (Pippa, wave 2)

For example, Jo, who has a visual impairment, explained how enrolling on her social history course has been particularly valuable in familiarising herself with her new location, as it provided her with the opportunity to find out more about the city, as well as inspiring her to visit the surrounding area.

"I have learned an awful lot about the city and the area, which I wouldn't have done because I can't read, because I can't go and get books out. I just wouldn't have been able to find out anything like the in depth history of the town. Last week we went off and spent the day in Melton Mowbray looking at the bits and pieces we had talked about in class, and we've been to Loughborough and looked at the churches in Loughborough. It has sort of inspired me to go and take the time to go out and look at these places which I probably would not have done if I didn't know the history which was there." (Jo, wave 1)

The opportunity to meet new people was referred to by all of the newcomers to the city. Each of the learners made many new acquaintances, some of which developed into friendships.

"You meet a whole new circle of people, people you wouldn't normally meet, which is nice... Meeting new people. That has been really helpful because you know, you are meeting people from all over the place, not just your immediate neighbourhood. So it's spreading your

circle of friends. Next week I'm going off to meet some people. We met through the French circle." (Judi, wave 2)

However, it was not only making new friends that developed the learners' sense of belonging. Judi, Tom and Jo spoke on several occasions about the importance of recognising people in the street, and the way in this had helped make the city feel like home. When asked, during her third interview, what was behind this, she paused for a while and then thoughtfully explained the importance of recognition and familiarity.

"I think it's becoming familiar. That was very difficult at first. Seeing people I recognise. I've always liked being with people and talking to people" (Judi, wave 3)

Twelve months earlier, when faced with the same question, Tom, Judi's husband, had indicated that this process of familiarisation had just started to begin.

"Judi said one of the things she missed was not recognising people in the streets, even a familiar face, even if you didn't know their name. So to start doing that is good." (Tom, wave 2)

Whether as friends or acquaintances, finding legitimate opportunities to interact with people with similar interests is extremely valuable, especially for those learners who have no other contacts in the city. Pippa, who had come to the city to take up a new job, was also able to meet people and make friends through her work. For Judi, Tom and Jo, no such established networks existed.

"I had moved into a city, not working, not knowing anybody, not having any children. It was a very useful way of interacting with people and I did make a friend there and we used to go out for lunch." (Jo, wave 1)

As Judi explained, the opportunity to meet and interact with people with similar interests provided an opportunity for her to quickly develop a sense of belonging in a situation where she could have easily been an outsider.

"It's not like going and meeting people socially, say where you have to start a conversation and carry on the conversation. So you can be part of this group without feeling in any way that you are an outsider, even though you are. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? Moving somewhere and being an outsider, when you're young and you move, you've got children, you've got lots of other things so you go and meet people when you take children to school, you get involved with other families. When you move when you're older, that bit that enables you to get inside and meet people in different circles is gone. So going to classes has done that in a way." (Judi, wave 2)

As illustrated above, enrolling in learning provision can be a very powerful way of helping newcomers to feel settled in their new home, transforming their perspective from one of being an outsider to one of being more on the inside. It can help them to become familiar with both places and people, either on a level that simply facilitates recognition, or that results in new friendships and a sense of belonging. In a society with increasing geographical mobility, where many individuals are living far away from family and long established friends, learning can be a useful tool for building networks and developing social capital by bringing people together around common interests and purposes (Balatti and Falk, 2002).

Moving on

Only one of the learners interviewed was planning to move out of the city in the near future. Denise was intending to move with her husband to Greece and had therefore enrolled on a Greek course before leaving in order to develop her language skills. She explained that her motivation for learning was to:

"Communicate with the Greek people, because they make the effort to learn English and I think it's only fair that we should make the effort too." (Denise, wave 1)

Although connected by a theme of changing location, for a number of reasons, Denise's situation is very different from that of Pippa, Judi, Tom and Jo. Denise's transition is anticipated rather than actual, her learning is taking place in her original rather than intended location, and her engagement in learning is with a specific aim of learning the language spoken, rather than to meet new people or familiarise herself with the location. Only time will tell the extent to which this learning helps her settle into her new home, and such data will not be available in my study. It is of interest to note, however, that all of the learners who had enrolled with the college in order to assist their settlement in the city had previously been engaged in learning. If it was through this previous activity that Pippa, Judi, Tom and Jo realised the potential of learning to assist their integration, then Denise too might learn from her experience at the college and enrol in further learning in her new home.

To summarise, learning can play a role in helping adults both to prepare for, and to settle into new locations. The content of the learning, and in particular, the opportunity to engage with other learners are both key mediating factors in the production of these benefits. Through these mediating factors, learning can equip adults with the skills and knowledge that they need to effectively settle into a new area, and it can create opportunities to recognise and become familiar with new places and people, either on a level that simply facilitates recognition, or that results in new friendships and a sense of belonging. For those learners who are not easily able to access established networks in their new location, for example through a workplace, enrolment on adult education provision can be a particularly vital way of supporting integration.

Changing health

This section explores the role of learning in supporting and stimulating transition in relation to health. It draws on data provided by two learners for whom participation in formal learning has played a key role during a period of poor and declining health. For both learners this transition was forced and acted as a trigger for the learning in which they were engaged.

Before my study began, Jan and Alison had both experienced such a significant decline in their health that they had been forced to leave employment. By the time of the first interview, Jan's health was restored to a level whereby she was able to fully engage in a wide range of activities although she was unable to return to work, whereas Alison's health had continued to deteriorate. The decline in Alison's health, particularly between the second and third interviews, was such that by the time of the final interview, she had had to drop out of her college course and was waiting for an operation. Out of necessity, this interview was therefore conducted at Alison's home as it had become extremely difficult for her to get out of the house.

For both learners, their participation in learning supported them to rebuild their lives and adapt to new circumstances following a period of forced transition. For Alison, whose health continues to be poor, learning has also helped her to manage her ongoing situation.

"I feel that when I signed up to start doing courses that was the beginning of my recovery, certainly my mental recovery. And it's certainly helped me learn to manage more effectively my condition." (Alison, wave 2)

Jan and Alison identified three main ways in which learning has helped them to rebuild their lives: by providing them with mental stimulation, by boosting their self-confidence and esteem, and by providing opportunities to meet new people.

Firstly, having been involved in education of all of her life, at this stage of life participating in adult learning provided Jan with an opportunity to continue to stimulate her brain by learning new things.

"I'm still an intelligent reasoning being. It's not as though I want to just lie in bed all day. That's not what it is about for me... You want the challenge of learning something new." (Jan, wave 1)

Secondly, poor health had had a negative impact on both Jan and Alison's confidence and self worth, however what they had achieved through their learning served to transform their perspective of themselves in order to rebuild their self-esteem and develop their confidence to try other new things.

"I realised I wasn't as worthless as I'd thought I was. You know you were actually achieving something. I think it doesn't matter how small the amount you are achieving, it can boost your self-esteem" (Jan, wave 2)

During her first interview, Alison had referred several times to the ways in which her learning had built a greater sense of self worth. When exploring this in more detail, during her second interview, she explained how this sense of self worth had helped her to cope with her condition and encouraged her to be more confident in asking for help.

"I've got a better sense of self worth... When you've got a greater sense of self worth its somewhat easier to accept help One of the things that the college really helped me with was that it's not a big deal to give me help. It's not anything huge. You just go up to the premises guy and say 'Can you let me down in the lift?'" (Alison, wave 2)

Thirdly, meeting new people was mentioned by both learners as being a factor in supporting their health transition; however, whereas Alison talked

lightly about a new set of social contacts replacing those she had lost through work, Alison spoke at length, and with much emotion, about the way in which meeting new people through learning has broadened her life. The following extract illustrates the situation that she sees participation in learning as countering.

“When you’re ill, you kind of get used to the inside of your four walls and you don’t see people unless they come to see you and the people that come to you are your close family or your very close friends, and they come over about once a week maximum, unless they’re living with you. So you spend an awful lot of time on your own... You basically have this sort of select little group that you see all the time and you don’t deal with anyone else. You don’t have to deal with anyone who’s slightly uncomfortable and you almost forget to talk to people that you’ve not known for years. And college really helps with that.”
(Alison, wave 2)

While both Jan and Alison spoke passionately about the role that they perceive learning has played in rebuilding and managing their lives following a period of health transition, they also both acknowledge that there is a point where ill health prevents people from participating in learning at all. For Jan, this period was immediately after she retired through ill health. For Alison, this point came shortly before the third interview when, as a result of her declining health, she no longer felt able to continue her studies. The removal of her support worker by the college for financial reasons, accompanied by a large increase in course fees led Alison to consider that the benefits of learning no longer outweighed the personal and economic costs of doing so.

“I was very down after I had to leave college, very down because it had been such a lifeline for me while I had been ill... It was really hard to give that up, but I felt that it was the right thing to do.” (Alison, wave 3)

“Obviously I went through a stage where to have to learn anything else would have been beyond me because I wasn’t in a fit state. But once you’ve got yourself to a reasonable level of health you don’t want to vegetate. You want the challenge of learning something new.” (Jan, wave 1)

As illustrated by Jan’s quote in particular, when adults first become ill or suffer deterioration in their health they are often not physically or mentally able to engage in learning. As they move through this stage and become more able to take on new things, however, learning can play a vital role on supporting and transforming lives.

To summarise, when adults are in sufficiently good health to engage in adult education, learning can play a key role in helping them to rebuild their lives and adapt to new circumstances, as well as to manage any ongoing condition. In particular, the mental stimulation provided by learning, the ability of learning achievements to boost self-confidence and esteem, and again the opportunity to engage with other learners, are all key mediating factors in the production of these benefits. The often-forced nature of health transitions can be extremely disempowering. Through these mediating factors, however, engagement in learning has the potential to transform personal perspectives and offer a vital strategy in rebuilding autonomy.

Changing work

This section explores the role of learning in supporting and stimulating transition in relation to changing work status. It draws on data provided by five learners who have all recently left work and four learners who are considering new areas of work. Two of those who have left work have done so from choice, while for the other three this transition was forced upon them. For all five, this transition acted as a trigger for the learning in which they are currently engaged. Three of the four learners, who are anticipating a change in their future work, were prompted to do so as a result of their

learning. More analysis and discussion about the impact of learning on working lives can be found in Chapter 7.

Leaving work

Much of the discussion on the implications of greater longevity has tended to focus on how life after work can be financed. There has been much less emphasis on how this time could be spent beneficially. Within the literature there is some evidence about the wider benefits of learning among older retired adults, but little of this directly addresses the role of learning in supporting adults through the transition of leaving work. My study indicates that learning could play a key role in supporting adults as they leave work, and suggests that this is an area worth further exploration.

When my study first began, five of the learners involved – Judi, Tom, Jan, Alison and Ted had recently left work. Although their situations varied, in each case, this transition had prompted them to enrol on learning provision. Through an analysis of their reflections on the relationship between their learning and this transition, I was able to identify five main ways in which learning had been beneficial to them during this period: through meeting new people, through providing mental stimulation, through providing activity and structure, through the re-establishment of their identity in new circumstances, and through the maintenance or development of self esteem.

Firstly, for those learners who had left work and therefore no longer had daily contact with a wide range of people, the opportunity to meet and spend time with other people was seen as being extremely beneficial. Jan described how, now that she was no longer teaching, she missed the children and other staff. For her, learning provided a new group of people to engage with.

"It's good to have the social contacts. I miss the staff room. I miss working with the children. But then if you've got other activities that you're doing, you've got another group of people that you can become involved with." (Jan, wave 2)

For Judi and Tom, meeting new people was also an extremely important motivation for, and benefit of, their learning. Their retirement had coincided with moving to the city, therefore as well as losing contact with work colleagues, they had, at the same time, also been removed from friends and neighbours outside of the workplace.

"You go out and you meet a whole new set of people, people you wouldn't normally meet, which is nice, and I would think when you've been retired for a while you have to be careful that your world doesn't close down a little bit. In moving here we've lost a lot of, just the people we knew on a day to day basis, so it does offer you that."

(Judi, wave 1)

Secondly, leaving work had also removed an opportunity to learn and to be mentally stimulated. Judi's work, as a researcher, had provided a considerable amount of mental stimulation, and she anticipated that her engagement in learning would be a replacement for this

"I've always had jobs where I've had to think a lot and I want to keep that. I think if that's something that varies your mind, you've got to do it is that's the way your mind works. That's what I like to do. I like to learn new things."

(Judi, wave 1)

Tom echoed Judi's point, about the importance of keeping his brain active. He also reflected that since giving up work, he was finding it easier to learn as he now had more time and was able to engage in learning during the day. Bernard, who had retired a while ago, shared Tom's view that he was able to make more progress in his learning when he was not trying to combine it with a full-time job, and attributed it to a freshness of mind.

"After I retired, I had a lot more time in the day and I found it easier to learn during the day, which is why I took

up French. And it keeps your brain active, you can always learn something.” (Tom, wave 1)

While for Judi, Tom, Jan and Alison, their transition out of work was long-term if not permanent, Ted was hoping that his period of unemployment would be short lived. He explained that the main benefit of his learning was the mental stimulation that it provided him while he was out of work.

“It’s stimulated my brain, so I felt very, very stimulated while I was out of a job and that helps me a lot too.” (Ted, wave 2)

Thirdly, having moved from a position of being in full time employment to one in which there were no significant external demands on their time, engagement in learning provided these learners with activity to fill the time and some form of structure within their week. For Ted, the regular activity involved with the three courses on which he was enrolled relieved the boredom of sitting around without anything to do.

“I felt like I was doing something. It supported me by making me feel that while I’m not actually working, there’s some sort of activity and I didn’t feel that I was just bored and sat there doing nothing... It also helped me because I sat at home for a whole week, but knew that on the days I had to go to the French lesson, it gave me something to do instead of having nothing to do.” (Ted, wave 2)

Similarly Judi recognised the value of introducing structure into her newly retired life. Her Greek course provided a focus for her week in terms of attending and preparing for each session.

“When you’re immediately retired... it’s quite easy to not have anything that you have to do at any particular time... So to have things like learning – you’ve got to do your

homework, have your lesson – all these kind of things that you've got to get done. You've got to make time to do all the things that you've said you would do. So that's good. It puts these points of focus." (Judi, wave 2)

Fourthly, for many adults, their identity is very much defined by how they spend their time and what job they do. Having left work, these learners were engaged in the process of reforming their identity, and for some, learning played a crucial part. Alison had not only left work, but due to her ill health was prevented from engaging in many other activities. Her pottery course had not only developed her skills, but had also provided an outlet for her to be productive and creative. She spoke very passionately about how this was helping her to reform her identity as a potter.

"Having a hobby, a learning situation and being able to say 'I'm a potter. I'm not a professional potter, I'm not somebody who sells things, I make things for myself and my friends and my family, but its something that I am producing'. I have something produced, something tangible that you can point at and say "I did that", because it's really important, I think to have something that's part of your identity, part of something you can show. I'm not just an ill person. I have more to me than that." (Alison, wave 3)

And finally, linked to the issue above, successes within the learning environment were often useful in maintaining and developing self-esteem. Again Alison illustrates how her achievements in her pottery class acted to reinforce her sense of worth and enabled her to take pride in what she was able to produce.

"A lot of people's self worth is wrapped up in their work, because it's what they do, it's what they produce, it's something tangible that you can say 'I do this and I am good at it'... And it's like, I can't be the best at something

that I can do. That I can say 'I'm really proud of that. I really like that. You could buy that in a shop.' And that's something I made, something I did, something I produced and created, and that really helps you to have worth."

(Alison, wave 3)

To summarise, for adults who are undergoing the transition of retiring from employment, either voluntarily or forced as a result of age or ill health, engagement in learning can be an effective support strategy as they seek to adjust to a new stage of life. In particular, the provision of opportunities to meet new people, to engage in mental stimulating occupation, for activity and structure, to re-establish their identity in new circumstances, and to maintain their self esteem, are all key mediating factors in the production of these benefits.

Starting and changing work

Although a number of learners had recently left work, only Pippa had recently started a new job. Several months before the first interview, Pippa had moved to the city to take up a new job in a Domestic Violence Unit, and although she found her job rewarding, she explained how it was necessary to engage in other activities in order for her work not to dominate her whole life. Over time, this learning led her to think about new areas of work and changing work patterns. For Alison and Naomi, their learning also stimulated thoughts about new areas of work. All three had initially chosen subjects out of personal interest, without particular thought to using these skills to support a new career, however over the duration of the study, their perspective on the relationship between their learning and work changed from one of distraction to one of engagement.

In contrast, for Ted, the engaging relationship between his learning and work had been evident from the outset. Ted had enrolled on a number of courses in order to increase his employability and develop the skills he anticipated needing to start his own business, and had deliberately chosen subjects that could best support his move back into employment.

By the end of my period of data collection, it was still unclear as to whether their learning would result in the establishment of new careers, however Alison remained an aspirant potter, Pippa was pursuing a more intensive and higher level course with a view to potentially developing a business in aromatherapy massage alongside, and perhaps eventually instead of, her current work, and Naomi had left the area for a new job with an airline company. Analysis of my data showed that there were a number of mediating factors involved in the development of their anticipated transitions: gaining a qualification, developing a passion for or an interest in the subject area, and the role of learning in opening up opportunities.

Naomi had originally enrolled on an unaccredited Greek course but had then progressed onto GCSE provision when this was only option available. Naomi found the prospect of gaining a GCSE attractive, as she would then have a full level 2 qualification, which she considered would make her more employable if she wished to change jobs. She also expressed interest in pursuing the subject further to A-level or a degree.

“Say if it started from GCSE and went up to A-level, and then I’d probably do something in, like probably go to further education to get a degree or something, and then I’d be able to switch my career into something like that, you know. I’m looking for a career change as well, so that’s why.” (Naomi, wave 1)

It had been my intention to undertake three interviews with Naomi, although at the time of the third wave of interviews, it did not prove possible to get in contact with her. A fellow learner informed me that she had left the area because of a new job, with an airline company she thought.

Alison had left work in the finance industry because of ill health. The nature of her condition means that it is unlikely that she will ever be able to work again. During her course, however, she became skilled and passionate about pottery, and she explained how she would like to use these skills in the future as a source of income generation.

"I would like to be able to buy a kiln and make my stuff at home when I was able to around my health. I'd be able to sell it. That would be brilliant. I would love to be able to do that. That would be an absolutely dream situation. That would be like working... It's the only way I could work part time because my health never follows a pattern.... So doing something like that at home part time would be ideal. But you know, a few years away. But it's definitely something that is in the back of my head." (Alison, wave 3)

Pippa too had developed a greater interest in aromatherapy massage as a result of her course, such that when it was finished she decided to enrol on a longer, more intensive and higher level accredited course in the subject. This course not only allowed her to widen and deepen her knowledge and skills further but also provided opportunities for networking, professional support, and business start-up support. As a result of these additional opportunities, she is now considering starting up her own business alongside her current work, with a view to reducing her hours at work when possible.

"It's opening up opportunities. It is that kind of choices and options, and chance to test things out and just expand a bit into life. I think that's what it's given me." (Pippa, wave 3)

To summarise, learning has a key role to play in helping adults face transition in their working lives, whether associated with starting a new job, changing career, adopting new working patterns or leaving work temporarily or permanently. A number of mediating factors are involved in this benefit of learning include the opportunity to engage with other learners, the mental stimulation provided by learning, the development of an interest in or passion for a subject, opportunities to gain a qualification, the activity and structure that can be provided through a course, and the role of learning opening up further opportunities and in supporting learners to re-

establish their identity in new circumstances. For each of the learners undergoing a transition in their working lives, a combination of these mediating factors has served to support them successfully through this process.

Summarising conclusions

Over the period in which this research was undertaken, nine of the fourteen learners participating in the study were engaged in some form of personal transition associated with either the location in which they lived, their health or their employment status. For some the transition was chosen, while for others it was forced. For some the transition had already occurred, while for others it was anticipated. For some the transition had stimulated them to participate in learning, while for others their learning had stimulated the transition.

Where transition involves a change in location, learning can help adults both to prepare for, and to settle into new locations, especially when they are not easily able to access established networks. Where transition involves a decline in health, learning can help adults who are well enough to engage in adult education opportunities to rebuild their lives and adapt to new circumstances. Where transition involves either a forced or voluntary retirement from employment, learning can be an effective support strategy as they seek to adjust to a new stage of life, and where transition involves other changes to working lives, whether associated with starting a new job, changing career, adopting new working patterns or leaving work temporarily or permanently, learning has a role to play in supporting individuals to successfully navigate these changes. As well as being able to support adults through a period of transition, participation in learning can sometimes stimulate learners to undertake a further period of transition. For example, in seeking a new career or in changing current working patterns.

One of the most significant mediating factors in supporting adults through a period of transition is the legitimate opportunity that learning provides to engage with other people with similar interests. Other mediating factors include the mental stimulation provided by learning, the opportunity

provided for structured activity, the development of particular skills and knowledge, the role of learning achievements in boosting self confidence and esteem and opening up further opportunities, and the role that learning can play in forming and reshaping identity.

9. Discussion

When my research study was initially conceived, a number of adult educators, including my colleagues at NIACE, were concerned that the end of the guarantee of minimum funding for Local Education Authorities in 2002/03 (DfEE, 2000) would result in a shift of public funding away from the provision of adult and community learning towards more vocationally orientated provision, and encouraged the development of an evidence base from which continued funding could be advocated. This research study was, in part, designed as a response to this call.

Since then, there has been considerable change in both adult education policy and provision in England and Wales. As outlined in chapter 2, education policy for adults has indeed become increasingly focussed on developing the skills of the labour force, predominantly through investment in accredited and vocationally specific provision. As a result, the educational offer available to adults has become narrower and the number of adult learners in publicly funded provision has fallen dramatically. Between 2004/05 and 2006/07, providers experienced a 42 per cent decline in enrolments on 'safeguarded' adult learning provision, as part of an overall loss of 1.4 million adult learners within publicly funded provision (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008).

As we approach the end of 2008 and the UK economy moves into recession, the measures announced in the Pre-Budget Report (HM Treasury, 2008) will serve to place even greater pressure on public funds, whilst at the same time heightening the need to remain competitive in a tightening global market. As a result it is likely that any funds available for investment in the education of adults will continue to be prioritised for provision best thought to support the skills development of the labour force. The funding of learning for personal development, and to generate a range of wider benefits of learning, therefore risk being perceived as a luxury to be reserved for times of plenty. On the other hand, we continue to face a number of important social issues that cannot be sidelined until the arrival of better economic times, for example the challenges of living in an ageing society, or those of multiculturalism and community cohesion. It may well be that

the arrival of a tougher economic climate will mean that more emphasis will be placed on seeking the most cost effective ways of achieving particular outcomes, allowing space for different policy solutions.

The changing policy context over the duration of my study played a key role in influencing the categories of benefit that I have chosen to focus on. While data are available from these interviews on a wide range of benefits, the following three categories emerging from the process of progressive focussing (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972) – assessment and accreditation, working lives and supporting and stimulating transition – were considered to be most important to my study for a number of reasons. Firstly, each of these subjects has received little attention to date within the literature on the wider benefits of learning, while in contrast much more work has been, and continues to be, undertaken around categories such as the health benefits of learning. Secondly, much of the current research into the wider benefits of learning is quantitative in nature. As these categories do not easily lend themselves to such an approach, my study has potential to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Thirdly, having incorporated a longitudinal element into my study, it seemed appropriate to focus on categories, such as these, where developments were likely to be seen over time. One example of this can be found as we chart the journey of learners' progression from unaccredited to accredited provision. Finally, I considered that these three categories were most relevant and offered the most significant contribution in terms of reflections on, and implications for, policy and practice.

The following three sections provide a discussion of the data on each of the broad categories on which I have chosen to focus, drawing out their reflection on, and implications for, policy and practice. The chapter then goes on to address each of the research questions in turn, before providing a number of methodological and personal reflections. The chapter ends by considering future areas of research that might usefully be undertaken to build upon this work.

Assessment and accreditation

This section provides a discussion of the data around the theme of assessment and accreditation. In particular, it attempts to explore the relationship between national policy and the learning experience of adults involved in my study, as well as to draw out implications from the data for future policy and practice.

A government commitment to the funding of courses that lead to qualifications, especially at level 2, has in recent years resulted in the provision of a greater volume of accredited courses at the expense of the delivery of unaccredited provision. An example of this was found among those learners who during the first interview were enrolled on an unaccredited Greek I course. By the time of the second interview the only option available at the college for those who wished to continue learning Greek was to enrol on a GCSE course. Out of a commitment to the group, a number of learners with no personal interest in gaining a qualification said that they would be willing to undertake the GCSE course in order to ensure that there were sufficient numbers for the course to run. In the end, however, the GCSE course was unable to go ahead and instead several members of the group continued to learn Greek together at Judi's house, employing their original tutor on a private basis.

At the same time as these developments were taking place, the national data on adult participation in learning was raising a set of interesting questions. Learning and Skills Council data had begun to show a considerable decline in the number of adult enrolments (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008), while at the same time national population surveys such as the NIACE adult participation in learning survey were failing to represent this picture in any significant way, although after a short time lag, participation levels have started to fall (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2007; Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008). One possible explanation, offered by the example provided in my study, is that committed learners who were discovering that suitable courses were no longer on offer in public institutions were finding other ways of learning, either individually or in groups. Over time, however, it might be anticipated that participation in such self-organised learning activity might begin to

decline as original members of the group gradually fall away and the group has no obvious means of replenishing itself. The potential move of such provision from the public to the private sphere, while supporting existing learners, risks failing to provide access points for those adults wishing to return to learning, thus potentially reinforcing the divide between those adults who recognise the value of learning and are willing and able to pay for private provision, and those who are yet to be convinced of the value of learning or are unable to finance their own learning.

Examining this issue through the perspective of social capital theory, the provision of publicly funded learning opportunities, open to all adults, can be seen as a tool for building social capital. In particular such provision can develop bridging and linking ties by bringing together a wide range of people through a common interest, and by connecting new learners with those already established within a particular interest or activity (Healy, et al, 2001). Through this linking mechanism, the public provision of adult learning opportunities can provide private organisations and groups with a key channel through which they are able to replenish themselves. An erosion of such ties could therefore serve to contribute to the exclusion of sections of the population who are disadvantaged either through poverty of resource or aspiration. While the DIUS consultation on informal learning (DIUS, 2008a) recognises and values the large volume of activity taking place outside the formal system, government policy risks jeopardising this in its pursuit of a policy direction that has resulted in a dramatic reduction in such provision.

The learners involved in my study held a range of different attitudes towards qualifications. While few had been motivated to enrol on their current course by the possibility of gaining a qualification, most were pragmatic about taking an accredited course if it would enable them to learn the subject they wished or to continue learning with a group of peers that they were committed to. On the other hand, some learners had such a negative attitude towards doing a qualification that they indicated that they would choose not to participate if this were the only option. If, as suggested above, one of the purposes of a publicly funded offer is to encourage more adults to

begin to engage in learning, then policy makers need to accept that any offer should include a broad range of subjects to stimulate the diverse interests of adults and include a mix of unaccredited as well as accredited provision without the need for one to necessarily lead to the other.

Where provision is accredited, the data shows that this can change the nature of a course in a number of ways, for example in terms of its content, its pace and intensity, and its focus. For some these changes were seen as being a positive influence on their learning experience, while others perceived them as being of negative consequence. Given, however that few of the learners were primarily motivated by accreditation, it becomes important that provision is carefully managed such that any disbenefits are minimised. Where the disbenefits of accreditation start to outweigh other, more valued, benefits of learning, then learners may continue to leave the system in even greater numbers than at present.

Within the data on this theme, the issue with most significant policy implications however, was that despite expressing a lack of interest in gaining a qualification, several months later all of the learners selected to take part in a second interview, who had not been previously enrolled on an accredited course, were considering doing so in the immediate future. At first glance, this appears to be a success for government policy, which has tended to view unaccredited learning as being valuable, almost solely for its ability to provide a pathway for adults to engage on accredited provision. A more detailed examination of what was taking place, however, highlighted a number of interesting challenges. Firstly as illustrated above, most of the learners who were considering progression to an accredited course said that they were doing so not because they saw the qualification as being of value to them, but because it was the only option on offer. Secondly, while the focus on accredited provision is based on the premise of upskilling the population, using level of qualification as a proxy for level of skill, many of the learners already held qualifications at a much higher level than those they anticipated studying for. One of the ways in which government is seeking to deal with the latter is by prioritising public funding for those

learners working towards a first qualification at particular levels (DfES, 2006a; HEFCE, 2007).

For two learners in particular, however, the anticipated progression from unaccredited to accredited provision was significant, although these examples also throw up questions about the sensitivity of policy towards the complexity of adults' lives. Naomi left school with only four GCSE grades A-C. Her progression onto a GCSE course would enable her to gain a first full level two qualification, seen by government as the standard for employability. In the future, however, Naomi's pathway risks being closed down by a skills strategy (DIUS, 2007) that allows the employer to determine which types of course are appropriate pathways to employability, rather than starting from the learner's own interest.

Secondly, Alison was on Incapacity Benefit as a result of physical and mental health difficulties that forced her to give up her job in the finance industry. Her move from unaccredited to accredited provision reflects the role that participating in learning has played in rebuilding her life. Learning pottery has had a therapeutic role that may eventually lead her to a position where she is once more able to return to the labour market. Again, however, the choice of subject is unlikely to fit well in a system where provision is primarily led by the demands of employers rather than of individual learners. Furthermore Alison's journey will take time and may not necessarily result in her being able to return to work. This timescale and level of uncertainty do not easily fit alongside the pressures of government with its demands for immediate and visible outcomes.

To summarise, the data on this theme illustrates, at an individual level, some of the consequences of, and challenges for, a policy that prioritizes the funding of accredited provision over that which is unaccredited. In particular it highlights some of the perhaps more unintended consequences whereby the range of opportunities for those who wish to engage in learning for the first time are greatly reduced and whereby the achievement of qualifications does not necessarily equate to a raising of skill levels at a macro level. In the case of Naomi and Alison, it also raises questions about

the ability of current policy to be sufficiently flexible to complex needs as to fully realize the benefits that are possible to achieve through accredited learning.

A key limitation of my research, especially with regards to the data around assessment and accreditation is that the majority of learners involved in the study already possess a level 4 qualification and are therefore unrepresentative of the wider adult population in which fewer than one third hold a qualification at this level (DIUS, 2008b). In particular it is probable that this group of learners are less likely to have negative attitudes towards assessment and accreditation in general as a result of their own previous successes, while also being less likely to value the specific qualifications attached to their current course as they have already achieved qualifications at a higher level. Had I anticipated at the outset that this would become one of my main areas of thematic focus then I would have sought to develop a sample that contained greater diversity in terms of highest level of qualification attained in order to explore how the issues played out differently for different groups of learners.

Working lives

This section provides a discussion of the data around the theme of working lives. As well as outlining some of the benefits to working lives experienced by the learners involved in my study, it also explores the policy implications of the permeability of the boundaries between working lives and learning for personal development or pleasure.

Current government policy is predicated on the belief that education is the best economic policy we have (DfEE, 1998; Brown, 2007) and therefore successive governments have chosen to prioritise public funding for post-16 education for provision which is seen as supporting the skills development of the labour force – literacy and numeracy courses, courses leading to a first level 2 qualification, as well as the rolling out of the Train to Gain programme. The predominance of this economic discourse within education policy is contested. Even among those who are committed to the government's vision however, there is some question as to appropriateness

of the strategy of prioritising the funding of courses which appear to be vocational in nature at the expense of providing a wider educational offer for adults in achieving this aim (NIACE, 2007).

Although adult educators often argue that it is the motivation of the individual learner, rather than the title of the course that determines whether or not a learning experience is vocational (Hughes, 2005: 28) the data collected within my study enables us to go one step further and suggest that significant benefits to working lives might still be experienced by learners who are not initially motivated to participate for vocational purposes. Only two of the learners involved in my study were specifically motivated to learn for vocational reasons, while the remainder were enrolled on courses that appeared to have little direct relationship to their work. Despite this, all of those who were working or looking for work, either paid or on a voluntary basis, were able to identify benefits to their working lives as a result of their learning.

In particular, a number of learners believed that their learning would have a beneficial impact upon their future employment opportunities, with particular reference made to the role of learning in developing skills and knowledge, in raising confidence, and to the qualifications attained through learning. Throughout the relatively short lifetime of my study, it was not possible to identify whether these anticipated benefits were realised and it would be of interest to return to this group of learners in several years time to investigate the issue further. Far fewer learners were able to identify ways in which learning has had a beneficial impact upon their current employment, although it is possible that this is in part due to a too narrow view of the potential impact that non-vocational learning might have on paid work. It may be that had I asked questions in a way that encouraged greater reflection on the ways in which learning can impact upon work, or asked questions at a later stage in their learning experience, then other respondents may too have been able to identify such benefits.

Three of the learners interviewed reported that their learning had made a positive contribution towards the voluntary work in which they were

engaged. In a number of public policy arenas, the government is seeking greater involvement of the third sector in both policy-making and service delivery (HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2007; DIUS, 2008a). In order for this to be effective, efforts will need to be made to develop the skills and capabilities of organisations and individuals with whom they wish to work. As with the debate around the value of vocational provision in developing skills for the workplace, a proposed solution limited only to the provision of accredited courses in volunteering, could be considered short sighted. As data from these interviews show, courses in Mandarin, Italian and computer skills can be just as effective in developing the skills, competencies and confidence needed to make such a contribution.

The key finding of the data within this theme thus lies in recognising the permeability of the boundaries between learning for work and learning for personal development or pleasure, suggesting that despite government policy treating these two arenas as distinct and separate, it is not possible to identify, at the outset, the reach of the benefits that can be gained from different types of provision. This is perhaps understandable when we remember that learners are whole people for whom the skills, knowledge and other benefits of learning gained in one arena, can be and often are, easily transferred between the two.

While the limited availability of public funding for adult education inevitably means that government is required to make difficult choices about where funding should be directed, it could be argued that adopting too narrow a definition of economically useful learning could therefore be counter-productive in seeking to develop both a competitive economy and inclusive society. While further research is required to identify which types of provision are most effective in generating particular outcomes for particular groups of learners, it is also worth considering other policy options.

One alternative strategy to that of concentrating public funds on the delivery of identified priority provision might be to target public funding towards the development of an adult learning infrastructure, within which funding for

provision could be levered in from a range of stakeholders including the individual and the employer as well as the state. In this way the role of government would shift primarily from funding to securing provision, as initially envisaged in David Blunkett's first remit letter to the Learning and Skills Council (Blunkett, 2000). The development of a coherent infrastructure for adult learning could ensure that a wide array of provision was available to all, from a range of access points across the private, public and third sectors, supported by good systems of information, advice and guidance to assist adults as they navigate their entrance to, and pathways through, learning opportunities. As illustrated by the learners featured in my study, many adults are initially unaware of where their learning will take them and therefore there would be a need for a sufficient range of access points for adults to begin their learning, even if the government retains its commitment to developing vocational skills to improve economic competitiveness as a final result.

As well as illustrating how participation in learning can impact upon working lives, the data also allows us to explore the impact that work can have on an individual's ability to learn; that is how work can act as a mediating factor in the development of further outcomes. A number of learners made reference to ways in which their work commitments limited their ability to effectively engage in learning, either because they were too tired or too busy to put in the required effort, or because shift patterns and work arrangements meant that it was not always possible to attend classes. The current skills strategy (DIUS, 2007) presumes that in order for the UK economy to remain competitive and for individuals to remain employable, adults of working age will need to continue to develop their skills and knowledge throughout their working lives. For this to be the case, not only should provision be offered in such a way as to fit creatively and flexibly around other commitments, but employers and the state should also consider how work is organised to support effective learning to take place (Unwin and Fuller, 2003).

To summarise, the data on this theme suggest that despite a tendency to create a distinction in government policy between learning for personal

development or pleasure and learning for work, in reality a complex set of relationships exist that permeate these boundaries. As a result, a narrow focus on the funding of 'vocational' learning opportunities at the expense of providing a wider educational offer is likely to be counter-productive in creating productive and satisfying working lives. One alternative strategy might be to concentrate public funds on the development of an infrastructure for adult learning that can then be accessed by a wide range of learners, from an array of starting points, for different purposes.

As a next step to this study, it would be of interest to look in more depth at this issue of the permeability of the boundaries between participation in non-vocational learning and the workplace. One of the limitations of my study in relation to this theme is that it was of insufficient size and focus to address questions such as how these benefits play out in different sectors or for adults within different occupations.

Supporting and stimulating transition

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, current policy with regards to adult education is focussed primarily on the delivery of vocational and accredited courses, based on the presumption that this will raise skill levels within the economy thereby improving the UK's competitiveness (DIUS, 2007). Although this may well be a key role of post-initial education, participation in adult learning also has a role to play in building social capital as well as in supporting other areas of life. This is well illustrated within the data on supporting and stimulating transition, where three main areas of transition are identified – in relation to location, health and work – and the role that learning plays within each is explored. This section provides a discussion of the data around the theme of supporting and stimulating transition, exploring in particular, the experience of the learners involved with my study.

One of the reasons that I had chosen the theme of supporting and stimulating transition as a key focus within my study was the high incidence of transition among the learners involved in my study. I felt that this represented a wider picture whereby adults in Britain today face a range of

transitions, often without the support structures that might have been available to previous generations, such as that provided through the extended family (ONS, 2001). In this context I considered that participation in learning might usefully contribute to the development of social capital by bringing people together around common interests and purposes (Balatti and Falk, 2002), and thus supporting learners to retain their sense of being part of a wider society, to contribute to it, and to access support from it (Schuller et al., 2002)

My analysis of the data on this theme powerfully illustrated how, through a range of mechanisms, participation in learning played a part in supporting learners to successfully navigate these transitions through the interconnected processes of building and drawing upon social capital (Healy et al., 2001). For example, those who had recently moved location found that their learning supported their integration into the city as it provided them, among other things, with a means of meeting new people with common interests and of gaining access to established networks and communities.

While the health benefits of learning had not been one of the areas on which I had chosen to focus during my study, changing health was also one of the transitions identified within the data. Here again, as with transition related to leaving work, participation in learning has a role to play in building social capital in terms of providing a safe place whereby adults can legitimately meet and interact with new people. In supporting each type of transition, it was important that learners were engaged in provision that interested them and provided opportunities to learn alongside others with the same interests. It is evident that such benefits will only be able to be realized if, within the provision on offer, there are a range of courses that stimulate peoples' interests and passions, rather than simply being focused on skills that may be useful in the workplace. A number of learners reported that their learning had stimulated transition as they began to think about opportunities for new careers or sources of income. Yet it was in participating in learning in which they were personally interested that had stimulated this change, rather than them being on a course that was primarily concerned with vocational change. This would appear to reinforce the argument made in the previous

section regarding the importance of developing an adult learning infrastructure with a range of access points.

Over recent years, much of the provision that would commonly be identified as being associated with people's leisure interests has disappeared as public funding has been prioritised upon certain target groups and upon certain types of provision (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008). As a result, we might conclude that its capacity to deliver benefits such as those involved in supporting and stimulating transition have been reduced considerably. Out of the fourteen learners involved in my study, only Naomi and Anne, the only two without a full level two qualification, would fall into one of the government's priority groups, although it would be expected that they should enrol on provision which would provide them with this level of qualification. Tom's GCSE Spanish course, a level 2 qualification, would also be considered a priority, but not for Tom who already has a previous qualification at level 4.

While some funding is available for courses outside of policy priorities, this has been reduced dramatically with an expectation that the shortfall is made up through raising fee income. Providers have responded with a combination of raising fees and reducing provision. By the time of the third wave of interviews, the impact of these decisions were beginning to be widely felt and all four of the learners interviewed had been affected in some way. Pippa and Judi had both been originally enrolled on a level 1 Greek course. No provision was now being made for learning Greek as there had been insufficient numbers to run the GCSE course and an unaccredited Greek course had not been considered financially viable. Jan had been enrolled on a level 1 computer course which she had enjoyed and hoped to progress onto the next level. The only options currently on offer for developing her skills however were accredited courses focussed on using ICT in the workplace. As she considered it unlikely that she would return to work again, and because she loathed exams and considered that they ruined the learning experience, she did not consider any of these courses to be a suitable option. Alison's Jazz and Blues singing course was no longer running, and although it was still possible to learn pottery, the combination of the withdrawal of her support worker for financial reasons and a large

increase in her fees as a result in changes to the colleges concessionary policy, meant that it was no longer practical for her to continue learning, especially given her deteriorating health and low income level.

During their third interview, each of the four learners reported that they were continuing to learn in some form, though none of them had remained in publicly funded provision. Those who could afford it had been able to access private provision, others were learning by themselves at home. While they may continue to enjoy the benefits of engaging in learning, others who might have discovered these for the first time now face reduced opportunities to access such existing networks and draw on the social capital afforded by such opportunities.

To summarise, the data on this theme suggests that learning can play a significant role in supporting adults through a range of transitions related to location, health and work. This is primarily mediated through the role of learning in strengthening social networks and thus building social capital. Engagement in learning around an area of personal interest, however, can also provide mental stimulation and boost confidence, but this can only be possible if such courses are made available, and recent policy changes have reduced opportunities for such interaction.

This study ends in challenging times for the field of adult education. Further research into the impact of the massive reduction in adult learning provision on existing and potential learners would therefore be of considerable interest. While data are available on how much less is being spent (IFLL, 2008), and on changing patterns of provision and participation (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008), no assessment has yet been made on the benefits of learning that are being forgone, either at an individual or a macro level.

Addressing the research questions

In undertaking my study, I set out to answer the following three research questions: What are the some of the potential wider benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision? How do these benefits emerge and develop over time? And what do learners believe are the mediating

factors involved in the production of these benefits? This section attempts to provide an answer to each of these questions in turn, drawing from the literature reviewed as well as from the data collected within my study.

What are the some of the potential wider benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision?

In recent years, a growing body of evidence around the benefits of learning has begun to emerge, addressing both the narrow economic benefits of learning such as employability, productivity and income (Blundell et al., 1996; Bonjour et al., 2002; Jenkins et al., 2002), as well as wider non-economic benefits, such as crime (Feinstein, 2002a) family formation and dissolution (Blackwell and Bynner, 2002), and health (James, 2001; Feinstein, 2002b). Based on large datasets such as the national cohort studies, many of these studies provide an analysis of the benefits of achieving a certain level of skill or qualification (Bynner and Egerton, 2001; Bynner et al., 2001; Feinstein, 2002a; Feinstein, 2002b; Bynner et al., 2003), rather than of having actually participated in learning, while among those studies that do focus on the benefits of participation, few have a specific focus on adult and community learning provision as a setting (McGivney, 1994; Balatti and Falk, 2002). My first research question was constructed in response to this gap in the literature.

In response to the open exploratory nature of the questions used within the first wave of interviews, learners identified a wide range of anticipated and realised benefits resulting from their participation in learning, which I categorised under the following broad headings: accreditation and assessment, civic participation, confidence and self esteem, enjoyment and fun, health and well-being, knowledge and skills, progression, relationships, transition, and work and economy (Schuller et al, 2002). As it would not have been feasible to explore each of these categories in detail, I chose to concentrate, through a process of progressive focussing upon three categories of benefit: assessment and accreditation, working lives, and stimulating and supporting transition (see chapters 6, 7 and 8).

The data on assessment and accreditation illustrated that rather than being able to simply identify a list of benefits of participating on accredited provision, the existence of assessment and accreditation, within a course, can impact upon an adult's ability to learn, by influencing the nature of provision in terms of its content, its pace and intensity, and its focus. For some, this had a beneficial impact upon their learning, while for others the impact was negative. The data also demonstrated that while gaining a qualification can be perceived as being of benefit in its own right, it can also lead to the production of further benefits, for example in developing a sense of pride and achievement, in securing recognition by others for the learning that has taken place, and in opening up progression routes to further opportunities.

The data on working lives demonstrated that participation in adult and community learning provision, typically thought of as being non-vocational, can have a beneficial impact in a number of ways that extend beyond narrowly focused definitions of employment, income and productivity. Participation in learning was shown to play a key role in supporting the development of current and future employment opportunities, whether paid or unpaid, as well as in generating additional income or making cost savings.

The data on supporting and stimulating transition, which related specifically to transitions associated with changing location, changing work and changing health, highlighted the role that participation in adult and community learning provision can play in supporting learners to successfully navigate changes and adapt to new circumstances, as well as in stimulating learners to make further changes to their circumstances.

How do these benefits emerge and develop over time?

Policymakers are primarily interested in causing things to happen, rather than in simply generating an association that can only be recognised subsequently. Yet much of the literature around the wider benefits of learning does not allow the possibility of distinguishing between the two (Schuller et al., 2001). Even where learners are explicitly asked to identify

the benefits of their learning experience, such studies have usually adopted a retrospective approach to identifying the benefits of previously undertaken learning, rather than seeking to capture these benefits as they emerge and develop (Dench and Regan, 2000; Schuller et al., 2002). My second research question was constructed in response to this gap in the literature.

In order to capture the emergence and development of benefits over time and to allow for the fact that the full range of benefits may not emerge during or immediately after the learning experience (Sargant and Aldridge, 2003), I introduced a longitudinal element to my study by undertaking three waves of interviewing over a period of 18 months. While the length of time between the first and final interview waves was only 18 months, I considered that the use of such a limited timeframe still fit within the definition of longitudinal research provided above. After each interview wave, an analysis of the benefits in relation to each theme was carried out, enabling me to identify how these developed throughout the lifetime of my study. As well as being able to identify how benefits emerged and developed over time, this approach also enabled me in some circumstances to chart the continuum of benefits from being aspirational to becoming realised.

The data on assessment and accreditation reflected a series of changing attitudes towards, and experiences of, accredited provision over the period in which this was undertaken. A number of learners who had not originally intended to work towards a qualification found themselves participating on, or at least considering, an accredited course as their learning progressed. Although this was in part an impact of policy on available provision, a number of learners also developed aspirations and the confidence to progress in this way. For other learners, the negative impact of assessment upon their learning experience, over time, not only persuaded them against undertaking further accredited courses in the future, but also served to negate other benefits of learning such as their enjoyment of the learning experience.

The data on working lives illustrated powerfully how many of the benefits of learning that emerge and develop over time can be completely unanticipated by the learner as they begin their course. Although most learners involved in my study were enrolled on courses that appeared to have little direct relationship with their working lives, all of those who were in or looking for work, either paid or voluntary, were able to identify the emergence of benefits in relation to their working lives. These benefits included developing transferable skills and knowledge, gaining greater energy and enthusiasm for work, broadening career aspirations, building confidence and identifying new ways of making or saving money. After a period of only eighteen months, many of these benefits in relation to future employment and opportunities for making money remained aspirational, although for a small number, these were beginning to become realised, especially as learners began to develop their skills and knowledge, and to anticipate the value of the qualifications they would obtain, and the confidence that was being built, and thus began to reflect upon potential opportunities that could become available to them.

The data on supporting and stimulating transition was of particular interest when looking at this research question. Over time the skills, knowledge and relationships acquired through participation in learning supported the gradual but steady process of settling in to a new location, especially important for those without easy access to established networks. In contrast the relationship between learning and health transition was much more complex, whereby not only could learning support the transformation or management of poor health over time, but the changing health of the learner over time also had considerable impact upon the extent to which the learner was able to participate in learning. For those leaving work, participation in learning, over time, played a key part in helping them to adjust to a new way of life, building new networks and engaging in new activities. Of particular interest, for a number of learners, participation in learning resulted in the emergence and development of aspirations to engage in new and different types of work.

What do learners believe are the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits?

As well as identifying what the benefits of learning might be, it is also important that policy-makers and practitioners understand how these benefits can be realised. However, while most of the literature in this field of research contributes to our thinking on what the benefits of learning could be, little is known about the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits. My final research question was constructed in response to this gap in the literature.

In order to collect data on perceptions of the mediating factors involved in the production of learning benefits, the second and third wave of interviews included specific questions to explore with learners the role that they thought their learning had played in the development of the benefits identified. The complexity of learners' responses, highlighting a range of interlinked factors, as well as the way in which some benefits could also be viewed as mediating factors in the development of further benefits, supported the critique of current linear models (Hammond, 2002; Hammond, 2004; DfES, 2006b) as being too simplistic and thereby failing to reflect the dynamic nature of the relationships involved and the contexts in which these relationships are located (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006).

The data on assessment and accreditation demonstrated that a learner's attitude towards accreditation can be a key factor in determining whether gaining a qualification could be considered a benefit of learning. Those who perceived it to be such either felt that qualifications had some intrinsic value of their own or were able to identify a way in which they might make practical use of the qualification. As well as being a benefit of learning, the data demonstrated that gaining a qualification can also be seen as a mediating factor in the production of further benefits of learning: by developing a sense of pride and achievement; by securing recognition by others for the learning taken place; and by opening up progression routes to further opportunities.

The data on working lives illustrated how the development of skills and knowledge through learning can be a key mediating factor in the production of benefits in this area. Other mediating factors in the production of benefits associated with working lives include the role of participation in learning in providing mental stimulation, in generating greater energy and enthusiasm for work, in contributing to a healthy work-life balance, in resulting in recognised qualifications and in raising confidence. As with the theme of assessment and accreditation, the data also showed how work itself can act as a mediating factor in the development of further outcomes, both positive and negative.

The data on supporting and stimulating transition suggested that the development of social capital through the provision of legitimate opportunities to engage with other people with similar interests can be one of the most significant mediating factors in supporting adults through a period of transition. Being able to engage in mentally stimulating activity can also be a key mediating factor, especially for those making a transition out of the workplace, as is the role of learning in supporting adults to shape their identity in new circumstances. Other mediating factors include the opportunity provided for structured activity, the development of particular skills and knowledge, and the role of learning achievements in boosting self-confidence and esteem.

The data collected and analysed within my study has thus enabled me to address each of the three research questions outlined above. In doing so, however a number of methodological issues have been raised and areas for further investigation have emerged. These are discussed in turn in the following sections.

Methodological reflections

This section provides a consideration of a number of methodological issues relevant to my study. Firstly it reflects on the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews as my primary method of data collection, before going on to discuss a number of other studies that I had considered to be useful comparators when first reviewing the literature. Finally this section presents

a number of challenges that impacted upon the data collected within my study and thereby the conclusions that I have been able to draw.

The choice of a series of qualitative interviews as part of a longitudinal study enabled me to collect a considerable volume of valuable data with which I have been well placed to address the three research questions above. Firstly, As an exploratory study into the wider benefits of learning, the adoption of a qualitative approach proved to be most appropriate as it allowed me to examine a range of benefits arising out of the process of learning, rather than simply restricting me to a selection of narrow outcomes of learning (Atkins, 1984). It also enabled me to explore a number of categories in considerable detail, identifying relationships and patterns within the data. The use of a qualitative approach also facilitated the identification of unanticipated benefits, such as those associated with supporting and stimulating transition, which had not featured strongly in existing literature around the wider benefits of learning.

Secondly, the use of interviews with a number of adult learners provided me with a wealth of rich data on their perceptions of the benefits of participating in learning that extended far beyond anything that I felt that I would have been able to collect from other informants or from observation. The flexibility afforded by the semi-structured nature of these interviews enabled me to explore my chosen categories of benefit in some depth (Pope and Denicolo, 1986), and to be responsive in my questioning when issues of importance or interest were raised. Of particular importance in addressing my second and third research questions, was the ability to explore process and meaning systems with learners (Hull, 1985) and to seek examples and illustrations to refine my understanding of what learners were seeking to articulate.

The two studies, within the existing literature, that appeared to be the most useful comparators for my study were those undertaken by McGivney (1994) and Balatti and Falk (2002) with both adopting a qualitative approach in exploring the benefits of participation in adult and community education. The key difference between my research and McGivney's study

was her adoption of a survey questionnaire, enabling her to collect data from a greater number of learners while restricting her ability to probe learners' responses to explore the meaning behind their statements. While the number of learners involved in my study did restrict my ability to explore how widely some of these benefits are experienced, and how they play out for different types of learners engaged in a variety of provision, I feel that it would now be possible to use my research findings to construct a hypothesis and a set of questions for use within a larger quantitative study.

Both my study and the research undertaken by Balatti and Falk (2002) involved semi-structured interviews with learners in adult and community education settings. Both studies also sought to take into account that fact that the full range of benefits experienced by the learner may not always emerge during or immediately after the learning experience (Sargant and Aldridge, 2003). Balatti and Falk (2002) sought to overcome this by selecting learners who had been involved in learning within the previous two years, while I took an alternative approach of conducting three waves of interviews with learners over a two-year period. Initially I had thought that I was taking a more speculative approach in terms of whether or not learners might experience any benefit from their learning, however in choosing to explore a small number of benefits in some depth, I too purposefully selected learners for the second and third interview waves who I considered would be able to inform my thinking around these specific benefits from their own experience. Where I feel that my approach was particularly effective in addressing my research questions was in relation to exploring the emergence and development of benefits over time. By not replicating Balatti and Falk's approach I avoided relying on a single narrative of the benefits of learning that retrospectively covered their experience over the previous two years and instead was able to benefit from being able to identify how the narrative around adults' learning and its benefits evolved.

As well as confirming the value of my choice of methodology, my reflections on the progress of my study also presented a number of challenges that impacted upon the data collected and thereby the

conclusions that I was able to draw. Two of these key challenges relate to the sample of learners involved in the study and the decision to treat my interview data as constructed narrative.

Firstly, the difficulties experienced at the beginning of my study in trying to secure a large enough pool of volunteers from which I could select an appropriate sample, resulted in a selection being made solely on the basis of age. In doing this, I was then unable to ensure a range of participants across other variables. For example, many of the learners featured in the sample were recurrent learners committed to the value of adult education, with few having returned to learning for the first time. As a result, it is possible that their experience of learning outcomes was different, and potentially more favourable, than would be the case among the general adult population. As another example, the majority of learners involved my study already possessed a highest-level qualification at or above level 4 compared with around only one in three of the wider adult population, and in particular were likely to experience different patterns of relationship between learning and outcomes associated with accreditation and with working lives. On reflection, I felt that while the data provided a range of illuminating patterns of benefits and mediating factors, a different but equally valid set of patterns may have emerged from interviews with an alternative sample of learners.

Secondly, one of the consequences of choosing to treat my interview data as a constructed narrative rather than as providing direct access to experience was the need to recognise my role as an active participant in the construction of knowledge (Scott, 1999). In particular, I felt a need to continually recognise and address my own subjectivity throughout the data collection and analysis stages, particularly in the light of changes in policy and the resultant massive decline in enrolments on general adult education provision seen in recent years. With a professional role in an advocacy organisation concerned with the promotion of adult learning, I experienced an ongoing tension between the skills required to effectively undertake this role and those required to undertake rigorous academic study. While I made a conscious effort to limit my subjectivity, I become very aware of the ease

in which I could give greater prominence to extracts from the data that would support those arguments that I wished to make.

In addition to these methodological reflections, my personal reflections relate to the privilege that I have had in getting to know more about the adult learners who have participated in the research. Firstly, it has proved a reminder of the benefit that participating in learning can bring to people's lives, and especially how unplanned and unanticipated some of benefits can be. This has served to revitalise my enthusiasm for working in an advocacy organisation that seeks to promote more, better and different opportunities for adult learners, especially in the face of a policy agenda that seeks to narrow the range of publicly supported provision. Secondly, it has powerfully illustrated for me, how well intentioned policy and planning at a national level, can look and feel very different when related to the complexity of individual people's lives. This has reinforced for me the importance of remaining connected to practice and to the everyday experience of adult learners around issues in which I am engaged at a policy level. Finally, and connected to both of the above, the use of interview data within this study has reminded me of how powerful learner voices can be in getting messages across, encouraging me to ensure that, where possible, any future work in which I am engaged is designed in such a way as to allow learner voices to be heard.

Future research

As with most research studies, this piece of work has served to highlight a number of areas that would benefit from further research, with future research questions falling into three categories.

Firstly, since my study began, we have seen significant changes in both adult education policy and provision. The global economic downturn also presents a very different background against which to think about investment in the wider benefits of learning. The changing economic, policy and practice contexts all raise a number of questions that would benefit from further research. For example, in recent years we have seen a massive

reduction in publicly funded general adult learning provision. While data is available on levels of expenditure (IFLL, 2008) and changing patterns of provision (CALL, 2008) and participation (LSC, 2007; LSC, 2008), no attempt has yet been made to identify the benefits of learning that are being forgone, either at an individual or a macro level.

Secondly, the data collected through the interviews with learners have raised a number of interesting issues that it has not been possible to pursue within the confines of this study. Further research studies to investigate some of these tangential issues may therefore be of considerable interest. For example, a number of learners involved in the study chose to leave publicly funded provision and continued to learn privately as a group. Attention to the progress of this group would be of considerable interest in exploring issues around the recent informal learning consultation (DIUS, 2008a) and to inform concerns that a migration of such opportunities from the public to the private sphere risks reinforcing the learning divide, as well as undermining the role of learning in building social capital.

Finally, the design of this study and the timescales involved, inevitably placed a number of limitations on what could be achieved. Further research to pursue questions which have been addressed to some extent here, but would benefit from further consideration include an examination of the permeability of the boundaries between participation in non-vocational learning and working lives, and in particular which types of provision are most effective in generating particular outcomes for different groups of learners. It would also be of interest to either continue to track this group of learners over a longer time period, or to undertake a new longitudinal study over a period of several years in order to investigate the longer term benefits of learning, as well as to identify whether and when the benefits of learning anticipated after a period 18 months were realised.

Summarising conclusions

This chapter has concluded my thesis by providing a discussion of the data in relation to the three broad categories of learning benefit on which I have chosen to focus during this study, drawing out the policy implications

within each. The chapter has also sought to explicitly address each of the research questions in turn before outlining a number of methodological reflections and suggesting future areas for research.

Based on an ongoing review of the literature and successive waves of data collection, my research questions were:

1. What are the some of the potential wider benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision?
2. How do these benefits emerge and develop over time?
3. What do learners believe are the mediating factors involved in the production of these benefits?

While my first wave of interviews provided evidence on a wide range of anticipated and realised benefits of participating in adult and community learning provision, this study is primarily focussed on exploring in some depth, three broad areas of benefit: assessment and accreditation; working lives; and supporting and stimulating transition. As well as qualifications being of benefit in their own right, the presence of accreditation was found to be able to influence the nature of a course in ways that are considered by some learners to be beneficial, and by others to be of negative consequence. While typically thought of as being non-vocational in nature, participation in adult and community learning provision was also found to play a key role in supporting the development of current and future employment opportunities, whether paid or unpaid, as well as in generating additional income or making cost savings. Participation in such provision was also found to play a key role in supporting learners to successfully navigate a range of transitions associated with changing location, health and work, as well as in stimulating learners to make further changes to their circumstances.

The longitudinal approach adopted within this study enabled me to identify how benefits emerged and developed over time, as well as to chart the continuum of benefits from being aspirational to becoming realised. In particular the data demonstrated changing attitudes towards, and experiences of accredited provision, in part as a result of the provision on

offer, but also in part due to developing aspirations and confidence among learners. The data also illustrated how many of the benefits of learning that emerge and develop over time can be unanticipated by the learner at the outset of their course, with all learners in or looking for work able to identify the emergence of benefits in relation to their working lives, although most had enrolled on courses of little direct relationship to their work. Finally, the data demonstrated that over time, learning can play a key role in supporting learners to settle into new locations, transform or manage poor health, and adapt to new circumstances in relation to their working lives. Participation in learning can also be a key factor in fostering the emergence and development of aspirations to engage in new and different types of work.

In seeking to explore the mediating factors involved in the production of benefits of learning the data highlighted a range of interlinked factors as well as demonstrating ways in which some benefits can also be viewed as mediating factors in the development of further outcomes. For example, as well as being a benefit of learning in its own right, gaining a qualification was also seen to be a mediating factor in the production of further benefits by developing a sense of pride and achievement by securing recognition by others for the learning taken place, and by opening up progression routes to further opportunities. The development of skills and knowledge was found to be a key mediating factor in the production of benefits associated with working lives, with work itself also shown to be a mediating factor in the development of further outcomes. The development of social capital, through the provision of legitimate opportunities to engage with other people with similar interests, was found to be one of the most significant mediating factors in relation to benefits associated with supporting transition, as was the opportunity to engage in mentally stimulating activity.

The choice of a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews as part of a longitudinal study combined with the use of a grounded theory approach to my data collection and analysis enabled me to collect a considerable volume of valuable data with which I have been well placed to address these three research questions. In addition, my thematic analysis of the data also led to

the emergence of a number of key policy implications: Firstly, the data illustrate some of the consequences of, and challenges for, government policy that has prioritised the funding of accredited provision over that which is unaccredited. As a result opportunities for adults who wish to engage in learning for the first time, around issues of their own personal interest, have been greatly reduced. While a reduction in publicly funded provision may have initially resulted in the relocation of learners from public to private provision, this raises questions as to the means through which such groups will be able to replenish themselves over time, as well as to whether such a policy risks reinforcing the learning divide between adults with the resources and aspiration to engage in learning and those without.

Secondly, the study highlights how the achievement of qualifications does not necessarily equate to a raising of skill levels at a macro level. Among those learners who have remained within the publicly funded system, this study provides some evidence of progression from unaccredited to accredited provision. However in many cases this did not represent real progression as intended by policy, but instead reflected the availability of courses on offer. In order to ensure that adults are able to engage in meaningful progression, pathways should be sufficiently flexible to allow for the complexity of adults' aspirations and motivations.

Thirdly, the data demonstrate the permeability of the boundaries between working lives and learning for personal development and pleasure. Even where learners were not initially motivated to learn for vocational purposes, many reported benefits to their working lives. Too narrow a focus on the funding of 'vocational' learning opportunities, at the expense of providing a wider educational offer, is likely to be counter-productive in creating productive and satisfying working lives.

Fourthly, the data demonstrate how the working environment impacts upon an individual's ability to learn. If, as policy suggests, individuals will be required to continue to develop their knowledge and skills throughout their working lives in order to remain employable, then this raises questions in

relation to the organisation of work in order to facilitate effective learning to take place.

Finally, although current policy in relation to adult education is primarily focussed on the raising of skill levels in order to improve UK competitiveness, the data demonstrate that adult learning also has a key role to play within other areas of life. In particular the building of social capital through participation in learning can support adults to successfully navigate a range of life transitions. If such benefits can only be realised if, within the provision on offer, there are a range of courses that stimulate adults' interests and passions, then we might conclude that a continued reduction in such provision will also reduce the capacity of the education system to deliver such benefits that contribute to government objectives around social inclusion and community cohesion.

As with most research studies, the work has served to highlight a range of issues that would benefit from further investigation. These include issues associated with: contextual changes that have taken place during the lifetime of this study in relation to adult education policy and provision, as well as to the current economic climate in which we are operating; tangential issues raised in the data that it has not been possible to pursue within the confines of this study, such as the scale of, and implications for, the move of existing adult learners from public to private provision; as well as further research to address questions which have been addressed to some extent within this study but would benefit from further consideration. In particular it would be of interest to either continue to track this group of learners over a longer time period, or to undertake a new longitudinal study over a period of several years in order to investigate the longer-term benefits of learning.

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11.Appendices

Appendix 11.1: Education Departments, 1964-2009

There has been considerable restructuring of government departments throughout the duration of this study. The following table seeks to explain the changing titles and responsibilities of those government departments concerned with the education of adults during, and leading up to, this period.

Department for Education and Science (DES)	1964-1992	Created by the Merger of the Offices of the Minister of Education and the Minister of Science
Department for Education (DE)	1992-1995	Renamed when the responsibility for Science was transferred into other departments
Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)	1995-2001	Created by a merger with the Department for Employment
Department for Education and Skills (DfES)	2001-2007	Renamed when the employment functions were transferred to the newly created Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)	2007 -	Created following the demerger of DfES
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)	2007-2008	Created to take over some of the functions of the disbanded DfES and the Department for Transport & Industry (DTI)
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	2008 -	Created from the merger of DIUS and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR)

Appendix 11.2: learner questionnaire

Thankyou for your interest in participate in this research, which aims to explore the impact that learning as an adult can have on your life. I would like to invite you to take part in a short interview to find out more about your learning and what you expect to get out of it.

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself by answering the following questions? I will then be back in touch to arrange an interview at a time that is convenient for you.

Many thanks – Fiona Aldridge

1. Name: _____
2. Contact telephone number: _____
3. Are you: ☐ Male (please tick)
 ☐ Female
4. Are you aged: ☐ 20-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49
 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60-69 ☐ 70+
5. Are you: ☐ Employed full-time ☐ Employed part-time
 ☐ Unemployed ☐ Not in paid work
 ☐ Retired ☐ Full-time student
6. How would you describe your ethnicity? _____
7. How old were you when you left full-time education? _____
8. What is the highest level of qualification that you have? _____
9. Approximately how long have you been learning for as an adult? _____
10. How often do you sign up for adult learning classes? _____
11. What class(es) are you currently enrolled on at the Adult Education College?

12. Does this course run:
☐ in the daytime ☐ in the evening ☐ at weekends
13. How many weeks does the course last? _____
14. Are you studying for a qualification? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

**Please return to Nic Felton via enrolment or via the registers
By Friday 12th November 2004**

Appendix 11.3: Interview schedule for first wave interview

A. Opening question

- To start off the interview, could you tell me a little about the course that you are doing at the moment?

B. About motivations for learning and expected benefits – to find out their position on entering their learning experience

- To go back to the beginning, why was it that you joined the course?
Prompt: differentiate about the subject, institution, and course
- When you were thinking about joining the course, what did you expect to get out of your learning?
(Knowledge, skills, relationships, employment, personal, family)

C. About actual benefits to the individual and beyond – to find out their position while within their learning experience

- Now that you have been on your course for a while, what, if any, changes or benefits have you experienced as a result of your learning?
Prompt: motivating factors and expected benefits mentioned previously
- What, if any, negative consequences have you experienced of your learning?
- How have these changes/benefits/negative consequences had any impact upon those around you, for example friends, family, employer, work colleagues or your local community?
- What, if any, further changes/benefits/negative consequences do you expect to experience in the future?

D. Influencing factors – to explore what it is about the learning experience that results in these impacts

- What was it about the course that brought about these changes/benefits/negative consequences?

Prompt: curriculum, objectives, pedagogy, quality, setting, duration and timing, level and form of assessment, tutor, other learners

- What is it about you and your circumstances that brought about these changes/benefits/negative consequences?

Prompt: income, gender, family background, health, age and stage in life, current circumstances, innate ability and motivation, employment status

Appendix 11.4: Example of first wave interview transcript (Pippa)

Researcher: Can you start off by telling me what course it is you are doing at the college at the moment?

P: I'm doing Greek One

Researcher: What's Greek One?

P: I think it will run throughout the course of the year. It's split into three ten-week blocks, which should take me up to, basically converse, understand some basic phrases, get to grip with the elements of reading and writing, speaking Greek. I think there's, it says in the literature, kind of an AS level, but there's no formal qualification or anything.

Researcher: You said you're not doing a qualification, is that because you've chosen not to or because there's no qualification attached to the course?

P: There's not one attached to the course

Researcher: Is a qualification something you are looking for out of your course, do you feel 'it's a shame its not there' or are you not looking for a qualification at all in this subject?

P: I think it might be nice if I progress further and if I do, but it wasn't a priority for me in terms of... to get to terms with the basics.

Researcher: In order to get a feel for what your course is about, could you tell me what happens in lessons, what you do – a brief outline of the hour and a half you spend each week?

P: We work our way through... the course material is based on the Talk Greek BBC series, so there is a book there and it goes through unit by unit

and it will have different topics per unit, for example ordering drinks and food at a bar or giving directions or anything like that. Throughout the course of the lesson, we'll have homework given back and at the end of the lesson we'll be given homework for the next week, and we might watch on tape some of the series that's been screened on television. We will have different interactive exercises where we will ask each other questions or go round and the group, we'll do that. And there'll be tapes, sort of quizzes, exercises and we'll have to listen to a dialogue and fill in the gaps or answer the questions that we've been asked.

Researcher: How big a group is it?

P: It's shrunk (laughs) Initially it was quite large, about 16 or 17 of us, but now I think it's roughly 9,10.

Researcher: Still a good size

P: Yeah, I find it amazing. I'm doing another course at a different college which is a lot more expensive than this one, but still the drop out rate... I've not got a clue why, I guess different life events.

Researcher: What's the other course that you're doing?

P: It's aromatherapy massage course. A bigger... a 3 hour commitment on an evening.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit about why you joined this particular course, the Greek course?

P: It was one of the few around that did cover from the complete beginner level, that wasn't just a taster. I knew that I didn't want just a taster, I wanted something that would take me through. To really give me a chance to get to grips with all of the different elements that I mentioned before in terms of reading and speaking and understanding. So it covered quite a nice range for me really.

Researcher: And why did you want to learn Greek?

P: (Laughs) My mother has moved to Greece about 4 years ago now I think. And I've been over a couple of times and I guess that's been on my mind, that I would like to know more of the language. All be it the little bit that I tried to get to grips with just from phrase books I haven't actually used while I've been there. But on the journey down to there from Athens I tried to have a go and thought, no I'd like to know a little bit more so the signs don't look so mind boggling in completely different letters. I'd like to feel more comfortable with that. And because I moved to [the City] just last summer, so I think its really good for me to help get that balance so that work doesn't dominate the whole of my waking hours. There are times in my schedule when I'm thinking about other things that aren't... a different part of my brain almost, different learning for me.

Researcher: So you knew a bit of Greek before, you picked it up from phrasebooks, but this is your first....

P: Yeah it was really minimal. I knew please and Thankyou and I'd memorised one set phrase which was asking for the bus ticket down to [place where her mother lives] (laughs) and it was all phonetically. I didn't understand the letters much at all.

Researcher: So is it around planned visits to your mum? You're not going to move there or...?

P: No

Researcher: You mentioned you are also doing an aromatherapy course as well. In terms of motivations for why learn – lots of people just work and do the others things in their life, and don't particularly enrol on classes. Is there something about learning in general that appeals to you or is it about the particular things that you want to learn?

P: Probably a bit of both. I wanted to keep learning, in a sense. The last two or three years on top of work I've been doing a part time MSc but that's still quite academically focussed and its all about the work I do. It's all about domestic violence or whatever. I wanted to keep on learning but not have something that was not about domestic violence. I did also want to learn Greek and I wanted to improve my practical skills along with that healing theme. And be able to expand the different skills that I have. What appealed to me about the aromatherapy as well is that it is more of a vocational course. I don't particularly have a standard vocational qualification at the moment. A lot of what I have is a mish-mash of academic ones and basic vocational ones.

Researcher: So would you see this as something you would change your career to at some stage?

P: (laughs)

Researcher: You said you would like to do that because it's a vocational qualification, but obviously it's not a vocational qualification in the area that you work. So is that "I can only cope with this for so long and I'll have something there?"

P: Possibly

Researcher: And you also said "I want to keep on learning". There is a suggestion that's a positive thing in itself. Could you unpack that for me?

P: It helps me to get... I find that when I'm learning outside... When I'm in a structured learning thing. You know, I will do the reading and try the self learning or whatever different ways that you can do it for personal development. But I quite like the structured learning that courses can give and I find that it can kind of sometimes can reinvigorate the energy that I have in relation to my paid work and outside of that in terms of the social aspect of it.

Researcher: In terms of the social aspects, would that be the people you meet on the course, or your existing friends who you can then go and 'practice' on?

P: (laughs) Again probably all of those elements in terms of meeting new people through doing a course locally and being able to have different skills that I can talk about and engage with others on a different level both probably featured in my decision to do the courses. It's not something now that I have enrolled on both and have done them since September...., I'm not sure that will happen when I need it to happen in terms of create another social life with people on the courses. I don't know that I've necessarily got the energy for that now (laughs).

Researcher: When you first enrolled on the course, what did you expect to get from it?

P: I think I did feel, particularly with the group that it might give me some structure, to make me set time aside to look at learning Greek and getting to grips with that language. Aromatherapy one, it was around expectations that I would do well at key skills. That I would be able to then use, fairly immediately in terms of friends and family but also perhaps longer term if I was really suited to it, yeah maybe it would lead to a variation... a way to pull in extra money in a way to do whatever.

Researcher: So as a check back, in terms of what you want to use it for the Greek is for when you are in Greece and the aromatherapy for developing practical skills, maybe a side occupation or a new occupation if you want to. So how have you found it so far? Has it matched up with what you expected?

P: It has. Because I'd been thinking, particularly with aromatherapy when I enrolled last year I was concerned that it would be too much, that I would take on too much and it would have an opposite effect, it would lead to me being more stressed and more overwhelmed in terms of what I had to do. So I tried to enter it to this year thinking whatever happens, if I find that work

pressures and demands mean that I stop the Greek or stop the aromatherapy I'll still have learned, however long I managed to keep it going, I still learn than I managed to before. And that is the case I am managing. I'm not able to give either of them as much as I would perhaps like to, because life events come along and they're going to be the first things to go really. But I am enjoying coming. It does help with that energy lift if I can focus on something differently, for that time it can actually completely change my mood or my sense of my head space or all of those different things. It's really important.

Researcher: Have there been any benefits that you didn't expect?

P: Erm... (pause) That feels like a difficult one to answer. I think an appreciation of the teacher skills and the training side of it. What has worked and what hasn't. I've been more aware of that with these courses. What I've found hard, what I would like to see in place and what I really valued, and the importance and difference that's made across the two courses. It's been a bit of a surprise.

Researcher: Can you think of particular skills or particular examples that you could pick out?

P: I was really shocked to see that, the aromatherapy one threw me into complete and utter panic on the first night, absolutely because there was no... I guess I'm kind of quite privileged in the field of work that I do, courses that I've done previously – counselling and things like that, quite a lot of awareness and things introduced very gently. And the aromatherapy, the first night, its 3 hours and there wasn't a break, we never have a break. I was taken back a bit by that. If you go straight from work through from 6 all night. A huge room full of 17,18 people who are complete strangers, three of whom were men, and at one point it was “right, strip off to your underwear and get on the couch”. I was kind of rooted to the spot, and that was my idea of hell really. I wouldn't do that with close friends and family never mind complete strangers who were then touching what I would consider to be quite intimate levels of your body. There wasn't an awareness

of that by the teacher, at all. I kind of got through it by escape and timing on the first week and then went back and said something on the second week. I'd obviously paid my money by this point. It felt like it was a battle. It was well, you're holding a man and we've all got to do it. You'll be fine with it in a few weeks. It was quite dictatorial in that you've got to buy this particular kind of shoe, trousers, tunic, everything. There was no movement on that. People were saying "well I don't buy any products related to animals at all so I would find it very difficult to have leather shoes". "Well you've got to have them because we're going to be inspected, you've got to have them". There was a lot of that and I found that quite hard with that course.

Researcher: I would imagine quite a lot of people would not turn up again, and yet you did.

P: Yes I did. A few people didn't. But I feel I've got more used to now her style. I don't find it very comfortable teaching, but I'll do it to get what I can from it. I've made my peace with that and we've reached an agreement that she's ok at the moment with me saying that I don't want to be demonstrated on, which is when all the other 17 people in the class come and look at your bare parts (laughs). So I'll keep going with that. The Greek one, its an hour and half and her skills are greater. There's a variety of different exercises. Obviously it's not requiring that level of personal involvement (laughs) which is fun.

Researcher: Has she got good techniques in involving people. Do you feel that she has good teaching techniques in terms of helping you to learn the language and the different ways in which you might do that? Is that quite a positive experience?

P: It is yes. It's very hard in that there are certain sounds with any language that you don't make in another language. I find that really difficult. But I find she... we've got to speak and we've got to increase confidence in that, but we do that in a variety of different ways and its not all focussed on one person for too long to make you feel uncomfortable.

Researcher: You talked about being at work all-day and learning ‘freeing your head’. What is it about learning as opposed to going home and watching TV or going to the pub? Is there any difference in the way that it frees your head in that way?

P: I feel that there is something there for me personally around accounting for my time, and I can get benefit from certain nights going home and there’ll be a TV night, but if that gets to be too much then, its easier if I’m at home to do more or work or just sit in front of the TV and actually then when I go to bed it’ll all be work and it’ll still be there and its not gone anywhere, my mind has just sat and switched off while there’s been the television there. Whereas with a learning course its engaged in a more positive way. There’s actually very easily identifiable, tangible almost, outcomes. It’s boundaries and its contained. Its exercises, it’s this piece of work for that. It’s homework. It’s quite rigid but bitesize almost. I can know what I’ve done. I can go home and forget it all, but its still there and I’ll know that there are things that I’ll remember in class. My work is quite complex and I can spend days and hours going well over my working hours but not quite know what I’ve done. (laughs) That’s the difference I think.

Researcher: You also mentioned about not doing the aromatherapy course last year because you thought there would be a negative effect with stress and the workload. Have there been any negative effects of getting involved in any of the courses this year?

P: I don’t think so as yet. I think the crunch time was the last two or three weeks. It happens in life... the culmination of different events. There was a death in my family and work pressures went through the roof and there were these courses and that immediately ruled out...and then of course you get a cold. And the time you have available to do things and just to stop and rethink and sort out “am I buying this house or not”, and the bills and the post that are all mounting up at home. That time is eroded a little because I’m here and I’m somewhere else on a Monday night, so opportunities,

especially if weekends are taken up with sorting out....but it's been manageable.

Researcher: Has it been worth it?

P: Its felt it so far.

[Discussed details of the course. Started w/c 22 Sept – couple of months in. Greek course 3 terms of 10 weeks, intending to carry on]

Researcher: Is there any impact of your course on the job? Its not related in a sense being Greek and you've got a domestic violence job, but is there anything that's transferable back?

P: Not at the moment (laughs)

Researcher: Can I just ask you a couple of practical things about your course? You talked about the level of course, up to about A level?

P: I think its AS. I think the literature takes into account if you do a full year, do the full 30 weeks.

Researcher: Quite an intensive course then. On the questionnaire you completed for you talked about doing a part-time MSc. Is that particularly different to the learning that you are doing in a community learning evening class setting?

P: Yes (laughs) The structure for these is joyous and that fact that its so practical. I started it in 2001 and it was every second Thursday was the initial commitment over the first two years, and then I didn't do a module because of work pressures. I didn't feel that I would pass it if I did it so I dropped it. So I did that this year so that meant me going back down to London for sessions. The sessions were quite loose. The teaching style has been different. [description of teaching style on MSc] Yes, quite different to

this and I've struggled more with that, but perhaps more recently just because of distance.

Researcher: Is this the first evening class you've done, community learning provision?

P: For quite a while. In 98-99 I did a years counselling certificate up in Durham. That was an evening class. One of the colleges attached to the university. Before that I did shorter courses in adult teaching skills or something, and the odd thing like that. But I haven't done anything for quite a block of time

[closing of interview and discussion of what the research is for]

Pippa

Female, 30-39, Employed full-time, British

Left FTE: 20, BA honours degree

Learning as an adult on and off for 10 years, not signed up for an adult class for a while, just completed part-time MSc

Greek One and Aromatherapy, Evening, 10 weeks, no qualification (level of AS though)

Appendix 11.5: Example of second wave interview schedule (Naomi)

- Can you tell me about what has happened in relation to your learning since I last spoke to you at the end of November last year?
- What happens in the class? Has this changed?
- Follow up on details of the class finishing: what they are doing now, will they look for a new Greek class? *Had said that would get together and carry on learning*
- How are you getting on with your Greek?

Accreditation and assessment

S1: no qualification but would like one. Last time we talked about progressing through a range of qualifications up to a degree and perhaps using them as a way of switching careers.

- Have you thought any further about this?
- Would you still like to do a qualification? Up to what level?
- Do you still see this as a basis for a career change?

Work and economy

S1: See accreditation and assessment. Not an initial motivation but seems to have widened horizons. Works full-time which makes finding time to practice outside of class sometimes difficult.

- How realistic a goal do you see this as being?
- What are the steps you will be taking to get there?
- How does having a full-time job impact your learning?
- Has your learning had any impact back into your work?

Confidence and self-esteem

S1: Thinks she is not good at languages and has done better than she anticipated. Links to issue of knowledge and skills.

- Why do you think you are not good at languages? Is this based on experiences at school?

- How confident are you generally about taking on new challenges and learning new things?
- You mentioned that you have picked up the Greek more quickly than anticipated – do you think your expectations were low or you have just done very well?
- What effect has this had on you? Is she more confident? Ask for examples.

Enjoyment and fun

S1: Enjoying it, although had expected it to be like school. Factors mentioned included good atmosphere, everyone at the same level, no kids running around, everyone is mature

- You talked about enjoying the learning, can you tell me what it is exactly that made it enjoyable?
- Did you find school enjoyable? What are the differences between the two?
- How important is it to you that the learning experience is enjoyable?

Health and well-being

S1: no mention made

- Has learning had any impact on your health and well-being, or vice versa?

Knowledge and skills

S1: see confidence and self esteem

- What new knowledge and skills have been acquired?
- How important are these to you?
- What will you do with them?

Relationships:

S1: Learning with her mom, so can interact outside of the class. Supports her mothers' learning but sometimes gets annoyed with her. Likes the other people in the class, although no external interaction.

- What are the benefits to her and the benefits to her mother of learning together?

- What are the disadvantages? Does she feel like she would have progressed quicker if she was doing it on her own?
- What impact does the learning have on the relationship, and the relationship have on the learning?
- Explore annoyances and satisfactions in helping her mother learn
- Last time we spoke you were all going out for a Greek meal together? How did that go? Did the group bond more as a result? Any other outcomes?
- Would she be more likely to have made closer friends if she were not learning with someone close?

Other

- Civic participation – have you become involved in other activities or interests as a result of your learning?
- Progression – You talked about going on to the next level and possible progressing all the way to degree levels. Is that something you are still considering?
- Go through **motivations and expectations** – are they being met?
Communication while visiting her mom in Greece, thought it would be similar to learning a language at school
- Last time we talked about the **benefits** of learning (see above) – 5 months on, have there been any more?
- Are these benefits sustained beyond the length of the course?
- **Process** – Why do you think you have benefited from learning in this way?
- Finally, can I ask you why you volunteered to be part of the research?

In general I have found..... would you say that this is true of you?

Appendix 11.6 Example of second wave interview transcript (Naomi)

Researcher: So last time I talked with you, you were at the end of your Greek term, so tell me, what's happened since?

N: Um, we did um, in the spring term, we continued on doing Greek. And now we've progressed. We're not at the college, so everybody asks how we do that. Just to continue so we don't lose everything we've learned and the language sort of thing. The course finished and then it's not going to be offered in the summer time.

Researcher: How did you sort of organize to hold the class somewhere else? What was the sort of process?

N: We all got on really well and we all became really good friends so we were just sitting there thinking that we all wanted to continue and so we were trying to figure out where we could do it. And um the college couldn't provide a room or anything and one of the women said, well I've got quite a big dining table so if you want to come do it at my house, you're more than welcome. We go over to her house and we all sit around.

Researcher: Lovely, so are you doing the same sorts of things that you would have done here but just in somebody's house?

N: Yeah, yeah. We've gone a bit higher since level one. I'm not sure what the level is, actually. I think it's a level two. But I think that in the autumn term that we're going to do the GCSE. I think they're going to offer the GCSE.

Researcher: So is that what you want to do?

N: Yes.

Researcher: Lovely, and um, how are you getting along with your Greek?

N: Brilliant, I think so at any rate. Um, more in-depth now. We're going, you know instead of just hello, goodbye and the basics, we're getting into more conversation.

Researcher: What did you do last week?

N: Um, oh it was only last night....we did, um, conversations. It was like conversations between two people. And you had to read it and then you had to translate it into English. And you had to get what each word meant. And it was about a woman who sat next to that bloke and they were at a party and stuff so, it was all in the textbook and everything. It was really good.

Researcher: Terrific. Does it feel the same as if you're in the college or is it a bit different since you're in someone's house?

N: Um, we still stick to, um, we still stick to what the teacher would do in the college. We still stick to it, just more relaxed. It seems more relaxed anyway, since you've got the comfy chairs and everything anyway. We go by sets and we still keep our papers in a folder and everything. The same sort of thing but we just meet...

Researcher: [...] What happened to all of those relationships for you to now call them friends? What sort of helped turn them into friends?

N: I don't know really...we went to the Greek meal and there was [] and um, I don't know really. We just had a couple of visits seeing each other outside of college as well so, um, one of them has actually moved up and moved to Cypress. But, I don't know. We just still get on. We understand that everyone's at the same level and everyone's in the same boat. We sort of help each other, and I don't know, it's just really nice to sort of get on with someone.

Researcher: So when you say you do things outside of college, are they sort of things like going shopping or going for a drink or are they more related to Greek?

N: One of the girls, um, I think it was in the spring term, she organized a big Greek meal at her house. So we all took stuff and she sort of cooked a big Greek meal for us and there was mythology, sort of Greek mythology so it was really good. Very late night. But it was quite good. Everyone got on quite well.

Researcher: So I'll presume that since you're on the same sort of type course that you're not working towards qualification?

N: Not at the moment, no.

Researcher: But last time you told me that you'd quite like a qualification because then you could do several and build it up. Is that still your aim?

N: Yeah, um, because we found out yesterday that the college was planning on doing GCSE so hopefully that will go ahead. And we've all decided that we'll all enrol in it together and that we'll all just take on that extra step and go on ahead.

Researcher: What do you think getting a qualification would do for you personally?

N: For me, well, um I like the language and I've gotten on really well with it and also it brings my two GCSE grades up to 5 and I'm hoping that I'll probably get higher than a C, hopefully. But then it also shows, it's a hard language to learn, so it shows that I'm willing to learn it even though it's hard and unusual and everything so.

Researcher: So what does having 5 GCSE grades A through C do for you that 4 doesn't?

N: That's what most employers ask for. Having 5 GCSE graded C and above. Although I've already got a permanent job anyway, if I do decide to leave I've got the 5 GCSEs.

Researcher: So it makes you more employable and gives you more options for what you want to do?

N: Yeah, yeah. It may not be in a relevant subject, but it's still 5 GCSEs.

Researcher: And do you think you'll do a higher qualification after the GCSEs?

N: Yeah, hopefully. I'm also starting another course in September, it's []. So depending on how that goes, I'm hoping to go on a bit further the next year.

Researcher: What's []?

N: It's something for my employer.

Researcher: Is that something you want to do or something you have to do?

N: It's something I want to do and hopefully it'll get me higher in my job anyway. So I can go on to do business support work instead of just monetary support.

Researcher: And the field that you work in now, is that something you'd like to stay in or do you fancy branching off? Last time you said something about getting a degree in it and I was wondering if that's something like oh I'd like to do that or if it was something that you were seriously considering?

N: Well, it all depends on how I get on with the GCSEs. The field of work that I'm in, I don't really want to be doing it 10 years down the line. Maybe doing it on my own, but right now that's just sort of a dream. My mom's

planning on going out there to live so you never know, I may end up living out there. Not necessarily with my mom, but you know, maybe the main island or something but...

Researcher: Now back to the job you have at the moment, you're working a full time job and trying to learn something else at the same time. How does that work out for you?

N: Ok, everyone supports me at work and they all know that I'll do it. It's alright, quite good. It gives me a break and helps me finish out the week. With a partner it gets me to do my stuff while he does his stuff.

Researcher: And do you find that you get enough time to practice outside?

N: Yeah, um I've had a lot of stuff going on in the past couple of weeks so it's been really minimal, but I do during the weekends and maybe one night a week I do my homework and revise. I do try.

Researcher: Is there anyway what you're doing at the college has an impact back on work?

N: Um, not really because I'm really office based and um...

Researcher: I just wondered why you think you're not very good at languages? Have you done another language at school?

N: Yeah, um, mainly to do with school. I did French at senior school and then I did a year of German but I didn't want to carry on with German so I dropped that and I carried on with French. But I didn't like my French teacher and after the third year I was like []. I did alright but I just can't get the accent. I don't know, some of the words that you get I don't know if it's me feeling stupid inside and I can't bring myself to...do you know what I mean? You know the accents, and I just can't get those. I can do it if I'm on my own but if I'm in front of people I get shy.

Researcher: You're obviously very good at Greek so what's different between learning Greek now and learning French then? Is it the language or is it the difference between learning as an adult and learning as a child or is it the difference between learning in college and learning in school?

N: Um, I think because I want to learn it, you know, um, and in school I had to learn it so it's the difference between wanting to and having to. I think that's the difference.

Researcher: Would I be right in saying that you're doing Greek better than you thought you might have done? Now do you think that's because you had low expectations or is it because it's a fairly easy language for you to learn?

N: Probably because when I started Greek, I had no idea about the language. I had no idea what to go in there and expect. And every week, you know after the third week, it becomes so much easier because you want to learn every letter and you just get the hang of it and before you know it, you can read it and speak it and it's just like...wow.

Researcher: It's obvious that you enjoy it. What is it about this course that makes it enjoyable?

N: Um, probably being with other people who are in the same, like, situation. We all help each other out and we all bond and I think that it's just that we're able to talk in the same language kind of thing and we all struggle, and yeah, I think that, um, yeah.

Researcher: How important to you is it that it's an enjoyable experience? If it stopped being enjoyable, would you stop learning?

N: Possibly, yeah.

Researcher: [...]What do you think the advantages are you to you of learning with your mum?

N: Um, I can be myself with my mum. Um, I think that's a big part of it because obviously she's family and I can say anything to her but with someone else I'd have to step back a bit. I'm a bit shy. But I'm a bit confident and with her I know I can tell her what to do.

Researcher: And what are the disadvantages of learning with your mum?

N: Um, probably, when I'm doing my, if I was doing work or something and she's stuck and I'm on a roll, she'll say can you help me, can you help me. I don't know, I don't mind helping people but, I don't know.

Researcher: Does it hold you back at all?

N: Sometimes it can, so that's why I don't sit next to her anymore. I sit facing her, across the table and she's picked it up really, really well. She's progressed, like after the past few terms, you can tell that she's getting there. And it's nice to hear her speak the dialogue and she'll look up and be bright red and I'd like that. So it's nice that way, it's nice to hear her progress.

Researcher: What effect is learning together having on the relationship that you two have as mother and daughter?

N: We've got to make the effort to sit down together outside and practice with each other. So that would be nice once we've got time...got to make time. Um, sometimes I'll ask her if she's done her homework or looked at any books and she'll say [].

Researcher: [...] What are your thoughts about your motivations and expectations? Are you getting out of it what you thought you would, are you not quite there?

N: Way above. It's a much more relaxed atmosphere. The teacher's fantastic. She'll sit there and if you're struggling with work, she'll spend time and like, you know, help you go through it. Whereas in school, you sit

there and if you don't know it the teacher tells you that you get told off. I got loads out of it, it's totally not what I expected.

Researcher: [...] What are the main things that you've got out of your learning?

N: Being able to understand other people when they speak the language, you know I can understand people when they talk. And being able to read signs, road signs and airport signs, you know if I'm out there.

Researcher: And how about the [] experience, not just the language that you've picked up?

N: More friends. Socially, you know after college and everything. It's quite good.

Researcher: [...]What is it about learning that developed these skills? There's quite a lot there. What is it about the learning that meant you got all of these things out of it?

N: I don't really feel like I've [] my own development. I don't know, I just feel like I'm actually not thick. It feels like I'm learning something, well I am learning something, but something new. It's just nice to know that I can actually do it.

Researcher: Is there something about the way that it's taught, or organized, what is it that it did that school obviously didn't do for you?

N: Um, I don't know, I think it must be the way it's taught and the []. It's similar to, it's not....oh, I don't know. It's not like a classroom situation, it's more relaxed. You can all just sit there and chat, obviously about the course, and um, whereas at school, you'd just sit there. I think it must just be the atmosphere.

Researcher: Remember when you filled in the form, giving all your details, what made you do that? Because obviously not everybody in the class did.

N: I don't know, um, it's probably just to help. Yeah, to help.

Researcher: Is there anything else that you want to say that I haven't asked you about?

N: No, I don't think so.

Appendix 11.7: Themed Data Table: Working Lives

Pippa		
1a.1	And because I moved to [the City] just last summer, so I think its really good for me to help get that balance so that work doesn't dominate the whole of my waking hours. There are times in my schedule when I'm thinking about other things that aren't... a different part of my brain almost, different learning for me.	Q. Motivation for learning Work life balance, especially as living in new area.
1a.2	The last two or three years on top of work I've been doing a part time MSc but that's still quite academically focussed and its all about the work I do. It's all about domestic violence or whatever. I wanted to keep on learning but not have something that was not about domestic violence.	Q. Motivation for learning – is it about wanting to do some learning generally or about learning something in particular? Been involved in work related learning and now specifically seeking something not related to her work. Links to point 1 above on work-life balance. Previous learning identified as academically focussed, also on quite a 'heavy' topic. Looking for learning that provides a contrast to both of these features.
1a.3	...and I wanted to improve my practical skills along with that healing theme. And be able to expand the different skills that I have. What appealed to me about the aromatherapy as well is that it is more of a vocational course. I don't particularly have a standard vocational qualification at the moment. A lot of what I have is a mish-mash of academic ones and basic vocational ones.	Q. Motivation for learning – is it about wanting to do some learning generally or about learning something in particular? Healing theme relates to her work around domestic violence. Wants to expand skills in this area. Wants to gain a vocational qualification – already has academic and some basic vocational qualifications. What does she see as being the value of the vocational qualification? Will it help in her current job? Will it help to develop her career? Will it allow pursuit of new career? Other benefits?

1a.4	Possibly (laughs)	Q. So would you see this as something you would change your career to at some stage?
1a.5	But I quite like the structured learning that courses can give and I find that it can kind of sometimes can reinvigorate the energy that I have in relation to my paid work and outside of that in terms of the social aspect of it.	Q. Unpack your comment “I want to keep on learning” suggesting that learning is in itself a positive thing. Renewed energy gained through learning transfers into paid work. Why is this? How does this work? What is the process? What is it about the learning? Can she provide examples? Are there situations where the opposite is true?
1a.6	...but also perhaps longer term if I was really suited to it, yeah maybe it would lead to a variation... a way to pull in extra money in a way to do whatever.	Q. Initial expectations of the course Exploring possible longer term expectation around changing work role Variation to rather than replacement of current role. Additional source of income. Having learned for longer, does she think this is likely or is it still only a possibility? What factors were key in leading her this way? What are the next steps in taking this forward?
1a.7	So I tried to enter it to this year thinking whatever happens, if I find that work pressures and demands mean that I stop the Greek or stop the aromatherapy I'll still have learned, however long I managed to keep it going, I still learn than I managed to before.	Q. Met with expectations? Response begins with explanation of her concerns that she might have taken on too much and it would have a detrimental effect. Learning can have a detrimental effect on performance at work, or combined with work can have a detrimental effect on health and well-being Work pressures come before her learning and may result in having to stop learning. Even though there are some work motivations, her main occupation and its current demands must take priority. Decision made that if this happens, not to consider it a failure.
1a.8	But I am enjoying coming. It does help with that energy lift if I can	Q. Met with expectations?

	<p>focus on something differently, for that time it can actually completely change my mood or my sense of my head space or all of those different things. It's really important.</p>	<p>Links to point 5 above in relation to providing an energy lift in allowing her to focus her brain on something other than work. This is valued as being important in her work life balance, although linked to point 7, learning would need to be sacrificed if work pressures became too strong.</p> <p>Revisit this issue? Does it still help work-life balance? Does it still play an important role? Explore the tension about dropping it if work became too stressful.</p>
1a.9	<p>I was really shocked to see that, the aromatherapy one threw me into complete and utter panic on the first night, absolutely because there was no... I guess I'm kind of quite privileged in the field of work that I do, courses that I've done previously – counselling and things like that, quite a lot of awareness and things introduced very gently.</p>	<p>Q. Provide examples of additional benefit experienced around greater appreciation of teacher skills</p> <p>Drawing on previous experience of work related learning to compare with how aromatherapy course is taught. Used to more sensitive approach to 'delicate' issues. Previous experience enabled her to consider that not all learning experiences would be like this – gave her higher expectations of this course. Initially led to a negative response, but also gave her perspective not to give up and leave.</p>
1a.10	<p>And the aromatherapy, the first night, its 3 hours and there wasn't a break, we never have a break. I was taken back a bit by that. If you go straight from work through from 6 all night.</p>	<p>Q. Provide examples of additional benefit experienced around greater appreciation of teacher skills.</p> <p>Difficult to stay engaged with 3 hour learning session without a break after being at work all day. May have been easier for those who had not been at work or those who had managed to take a break between the class and daytime activities. Although 3 hours a long time to concentrate without a break regardless.</p>
1a.11	<p>... its easier if I'm at home to do more or work or just sit in front of the TV and actually then when I go to bed it'll all be work and it'll</p>	<p>Q. Exploring how learning “frees her head” and is different from doing other activities – watching TV, going out.</p>

	<p>still be there and its not gone anywhere, my mind has just sat and switched off while there's been the television there. Whereas with a learning course its engaged in a more positive way.</p>	<p>Has to be a balance of these different types of activities. However just watching TV delays thinking about work but it is still there when she goes to bed. Learning is a positive distraction to think about something else and engage her brain in a different way – more than just a distraction.</p>
1a.12	<p>There's actually very easily identifiable, tangible almost, outcomes. It's boundaries and its contained. Its exercises, it's this piece of work for that. It's homework. It's quite rigid but bitesize almost. I can know what I've done. I can go home and forget it all, but its still there and I'll know that there are things that I'll remember in class. My work is quite complex and I can spend days and hours going well over my working hours but not quite know what I've done. (laughs) That's the difference I think.</p>	<p>Q. Exploring how learning “frees her head” and is different from doing other activities – watching TV, going out.</p> <p>Contrast between learning and work. Work is complex and involves considerable work for not always very tangible outcomes. The ‘bitesize’ nature of the learning activity means that is easier to identify outcomes and feel that achievements are being made.</p>
1a.13	<p>I don't think so as yet. I think the crunch time was the last two or three weeks. It happens in life... the culmination of different events. There was a death in my family and work pressures went through the roof and there were these courses and that immediately ruled out...and then of course you get a cold. And the time you have available to do things and just to stop and rethink and sort out “am I buying this house or not”, and the bills and the post that are all mounting up at home. That time is eroded a little because I'm here and I'm somewhere else on a Monday night, so opportunities, especially if weekends are taken up with sorting out....but it's been manageable.</p>	<p>Q. Negative effects of learning.</p> <p>Work pressures, especially when combined with other issues and events, can make life difficult and busy. This can lead to a questioning of whether there is capacity to carry on with learning. In this instance, it was manageable. Link to points 5 and 8 above</p>
1a.14	<p>Not at the moment</p>	<p>Q. Impact on job including any transferable skills</p>

		Follow this up, perhaps with different line of questioning
1a.15	I started it in 2001 and it was every second Thursday was the initial commitment over the first two years, and then I didn't do a module because of work pressures. I didn't feel that I would pass it if I did it so I dropped it.	Q. Difference between this learning and that undertaken for MSc. Response about MSc. An example of how work pressures meant that it was not possible to continue anticipated learning pathway. Work pressures can lead to interruptions and drop out.
1b.1	Did it? Um...yes, I think it did because it made me think about, not only was it that that's what I was doing on Wednesdays, [] straight home from work. Yeah, um, but also just by sort of being in the class and learning and the Greek I have that association. That means sort of holidays, that means sort of planning breaks from work.	Q. Has learning Greek helped with work life balance, as originally intended? Provided an after work activity on Wednesdays. Stimulated thinking about holidays and breaks from work.
1b.2	Especially if I can do something and manage to do it well, then, or even just have that spark of interest because things are coming in that are completely different my brain has gone from being asked to think about one thing to being asked to think about something completely different. Um, and that can be sort of reignited and then that interest gives me sort of energy.	Q. Learning renewing energy which translates back into work Success in learning reignites interest and provides her with energy for rest of life including work.
1b.3	Um, yes. But that's just something I'm going to have to get better at, in terms of saying this is my time and this is something that is something that is equally important to me. Other people manage to have a work life and still get things done without necessarily saying that everything else comes second. And I've tried to change that in the sense that I can perhaps get to work with needing to feel very confident I'm doing everything I need to be doing to be a good student or whatever. And that half the girls are holding their ground a lot more in terms of well whether I'm able to do things this week	Q. Is work why haven't enrolled on other Greek courses and sometime miss aromatherapy Work-life balance - Personal discipline required about keeping personal time for important things. Recognises the need to improve this aspect of her life. Recognises a change in attitude us required. Needn't be excellent at everything in order to participate. This issue may relate specifically to particular personality types.

	or not, I'm going and each time I go I'm learning something. So and then to sort of change what it is in a sense or saying that I want out of it.	
1b.4	Maybe longer term. At the moment I feel a bit cheeky about what the college is charging. They started booking clients and charging £14 which the college then takes and I feel sort of uncomfortable about that. Not only for them paying for a massage from me which yes I can do, and yes it's very beneficial obviously the college covers the cost of the oils, I don't feel ready to charge friends yet at all. But maybe yes, I could see in another few maybe 4 or 5 months I will competent to do that as a way to kind of not only recoup the costs but perhaps have a little side-earner.	Q. Could aromatherapy still be a source of diversifying income? Perhaps a longer term benefit The college is currently charging but she does not receive this money Wants to be more competent before she charges people herself. Charging would be about recouping costs plus a little side earner. Tone suggests she is not seeing it a significant source of income.
1c.1	I was always keen to try and find something that linked the two. That linked what my working life has been in terms of my prior academic study wise and my working with trauma and violence, and that kind of desire to do bodywork.	Q. Why on the current course – biodynamic massage certificate?
1c.2	There's still that little bit of a thing for me in terms of making that final step. We have started to talk about how we would use it. I don't know at the moment. I'm still stepping up my practice, increasing that more. I'll probably do some checking out the basics of everything - how much it costs to rent a room, that kind of thing – and just see how it feels after May.	Q. What do you anticipate using this qualification/course for?
1c.3	I think it is... I would be doing it separately from work and I think that's one of the challenges for me because I can't not work full time. It is, as much as I love it and it gets me into that state of	Q. Does this in with current work or is it seen as being more of a new career path? The educational progression might potentially be a transition period

	<p>tranquillity and almost meditative state and it can re-energise me. It is a big commitment even doing 2-3 practice sessions of an evening, never mind doing work with it. So what I think I mean in terms of... It's completely separate from work in that... but it's not. It feels like there is a natural progression there for me. The way its evolved, the areas that I've worked in.</p>	<p>between current work and the establishment of a new career. She is still undecided and will look into what might be involved in running something parallel to her current job. Go back and look at the narrative of how this happened if I decide to make this a feature of my section on transition.</p>
1c.4	<p>I'd probably have to look at that, yeah. And then look at perhaps flexible working, compact hours, or reduced hours</p>	<p>Q. You would keep your full time job and put the two together at least initially?</p>
1c.5	<p>It's been variable. The first weekend I went down.... That was talked about. I was one of the few who had a full time job with a lot of responsibility attached. A couple of people were self employed. They said very clearly from the start that the idea is for this to be a nurturing space. One that doesn't drain you further. And I think I came back from that first weekend and everyone here was commenting that I actually looked like I'd had a wonderful weekend somewhere, that I was in love and I was glowing. That's not happened since and there's been some very difficult weekends where a lot of stuff was brought up, it's been very traumatic. Well one weekend. I wasn't able to function very well when I came back. I was taking sick leave but I was asked to it off as TOIL. So I had a day or two. A day that I wasn't in and a day where I probably wasn't working to my full capacity. As a process and everything that happens there, that feels actually really a tiny amount of negative impact because its generally spoken about that, yes we should all expect that the energy levels that we've to put into work</p>	<p>Q. How do the two fit together at the moment – the large study commitment and then work?</p>

	<p>might be a bit less, but its not so much given me that, I think there was just that time and it was the December weekend. There was probably a lot of different factors. One was the work that we were doing. It was the most provocative message that we would do. But timing wise that wasn't great because I was knackered 'cause we'd just had the November campaign for domestic violence. I'd been working ridiculous hours and just gone straight to what was then to be a weeks holiday (describes problems with this)</p>	
1c.6	<p>I'm not sure. I think its elements of different things. (Goes into a list of a range of factors). It's maybe a lot of those things. Yes work obviously, but then you could salvage that if it was a really strong positive experience.</p>	<p>Q. Was it work that made you feel like you couldn't commit to the end of the original aromatherapy course?</p>
1c.7	<p>It keeps me going. It keeps me energised and interested with different things and developing. And I think that keeps things fresh. That's the main thing. It's opening up opportunities. Yes in a way it is that kind of choices, and options, and chance to test things out and just expand a bit into life. I think that's what it gives me.</p>	<p>Q. Main benefits of learning over the period covered by this study</p>
1c.8	<p>Sometimes I feel very weary of what I'm doing. I'm very conscious that I've worked in issue-based work and violence based work for what feels like a long long time. I suppose I'm more conscious recently that perhaps for a lot of people when they get to my age, perhaps then to have a change in career and work towards something more meaningful. I kind of think, I've done the meaningful job. I'm wanting a change. I think a lot of people who work in the field do sometimes dream of doing something</p>	<p>Q. Are you looking to get out of what you are doing at the moment?</p>

	completely different without any responsibility, And it's not that, but I do, I'm just aware of that accumulative stress, and the impact of that, that it can narrow your perspective. In the world, like the one I'm in now. I feel like I've got to constantly keep an eye on that, otherwise I'm not going to be the best person for the job. So it's... I'm not desperate. There are things that I know I find very draining, tiring. So I'm keep a watch on that.
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Derek Not interviewed during 2 nd and 3 rd waves		
2a.1	Well I'm retired now. I wasn't when I started and the answer then was no. There was no cross over at all.	Q. Impact on work No impact as not working. Was working when started learning Mandarin. No transfer of benefits
2a.2	Well I put more time in outside the class which is helpful for the characters. But then again I always thought I would do that if I had the opportunity... I'm not making much sacrifice of time now. While I was at work it was a bit more awkward.	Q. Role of learning in transition between work and retirement Doesn't really answer the question. Not being at work gives more time for learning Explore how work pressures impacted upon ability to learn. Perhaps rephrase question on role of learning in transition
2a.3	I'm the only sort or academic one on it. The rest are all salesmen or potentially involved in using the language, as such I'm not typical of those. Just a background interest I mean we all come with our own interest in the language, which as I say except for me is always practical. They're either in one of the three universities in the county recruiting students or they've got a business in China or associated with a business in China or work for a firm which is operating in China. They are using the language quite practically some of them, to look for work or I suppose my goals are rather more general and less well defined than all the	Refers a number of times in the interview to the motivation of most other learners in his class being related to their work - practical. In contrast he describes his motivation as being academic, a background interest, more general, less well defined, for fun

	other people on it. It's just for fun.	
Simon Not interviewed during 2 nd and 3 rd waves		
3a.1	<p>My main motivation was that I have 2 colleagues who are also registered for the course, who also have Chinese wives.</p> <p>They'd been planning to take a course in Chinese, this one came along, they informed me about it and we all enrolled.</p> <p>I kept on saying I'd start learning Chinese but never did it. Now I have colleagues who wanted to learn, I finally got round to it.</p>	<p>Q. Motivation for learning</p> <p>Registered on the course along with work colleagues with similar interests. Had been wanting to learn but colleagues brought it to his attention and the incentive of doing it with others with whom he was working was the trigger for starting learning.</p>
3a.2	<p>I can communicate and talk to Chinese students at the university also. I am supervising a project by a student from Singapore, so I can communicate with her.</p> <p>The course is good because you don't only learn the language, you also learn about the culture and what Chinese people do and what they consider polite and impolite etc, which helps when dealing with Chinese students.</p>	<p>Q. Main uses of learning</p> <p>This benefit of learning was not part of original motivation – unintended positive outcomes</p> <p>Explore the value of this in more detail. Has ability to converse with Chinese students helped their studies, helped his teaching, helped understanding and communication or is it just about building and strengthening relationships that happen to be in his workplace? What impact has it had on relationship and work with student from Singapore?</p>
Judi		
4a.1	<p>Because I used to teach anyway so I know the problems of someone who always jumps in first with all the answers</p>	<p>Previous experience working as a teacher shapes her behaviour in the classroom. Further information available in 2nd wave interview</p>

4a.2	Yes, I don't want to use it for work.	When asked to confirm that she is retired, she noted that she does not want to use her learning for work
4a.3	I've only just retired actually, because I was working until I left Chester, and with moving out everything's been quite hectic and I don't know what's going on, and I suppose for me, well there are two things really, you get out and you meet a whole new set of people, people you wouldn't normally meet, which is nice, and I would think when you've been retired a while, you have to be careful your world doesn't sort of close down a little bit, became quite narrow. In moving here we've lost a lot of, just the people we knew on a day to day basis, so it does offer you that. I also think that it's important, because I've always had jobs where, I had to think a lot of the time, when I was a researcher for a while, before I finished work I was a researcher, I've had of jobs where I've had to think a lot and I want to keep that. I think that if that's something that varies your mind, you've got to do it if that's the way your mind works, that's what I like to do, I like to learn new things.	<p>Q. How learning fits into retired life – transition between work and retirement</p> <p>Learning in retirement helps in meeting new people so world doesn't close down when you lose the contact of work colleagues – especially important as she moved cities as she retired.</p> <p>Learning also provides mental stimulation in retirement. This is important to this learner as her job required a lot of thinking. This is valued as a way of sustaining mental agility in retirement</p> <p>Evaluate how well learning is meeting these expectations, especially as life in [the City] settles down. Are there any others e.g. structure?</p> <p>Further information in 2nd wave interview: see transition</p>
4b.1	Well I do think it makes a difference that you taught. Because you're aware, especially with adults of where the problems might be. So you're very aware of those kinds of things. And I've never said within the group that I was a teacher. Um, because I feel they might expect me to behave in a certain way. They might think that I am being critical or whatever and that I am behaving like a teacher. So I've never said it. I've never made any kind of [] to the fact that I taught. And I do suppose that I hold back sometimes when I can answer a question but I know that there are people who have to think of it longer, so I won't answer too quickly.	<p>Q. How has her experience as a teacher shaped her own learning?</p> <p>Not declared that she is a teacher, although it does affect her behaviour and how she reflects on the learning experience.</p>
4b.2	Well I think it's good to...when you're retired and when you're immediately retired,	Q. Role of learning in transition to retirement

	I suppose ignoring the fact that we've moved, it's quite easy to not have any sort of thing that you have to do at any particular time. Because you've got all day, every day and the majority of things you can say oh I'll do that tomorrow. So to have things like learning, you've got to do your homework, have your lesson, all these kinds of things that you've got to get done. You've got to make time to do all the things that you've said you would do. So that's good. It puts these points of focus and also I think the social side, you know, meeting and talking and telling what you've been doing and finding out a bit about other people. And they are probably people that you wouldn't meet normally. But likeminded people I suppose, you're all there for a common purpose.	
4c.1	Yes (pause) and I do think that's quite important. I think for a lot of people, especially retired people that element is quite important.	Q. So do people turn into friends?
4c.2	I still feel it is important, for me personally, 'cause I do like a new challenge (laughs) and learning is one of them. Definitely (Pause) I suppose thinking about it practically, it keeps your brain active and whatever (pause), but mostly, I do actually enjoy learning things. I really do.	Q. Referring back to first interview when just retired. Now that you have been retired longer, what role is learning playing in your retired life, how does it fit in, what part does it play, how important is it?
4c.3	I think she wanted a job with one of the airlines, and so she thought a language would be really useful.	Jenny asks about whether a third interview was undertaken with Leanne and then goes onto explain...

Tom Not interview during 3 rd wave	
5a.1	Our daughter's doing GCSE Spanish, she's a French teacher, they wanted her to teach Spanish and she had no Spanish, so she did some beginners lessons last year, so it's kind of moral support, so that's just the GCSE course.
	Q. Motivation for learning Spanish Requirement to teach the language.

5a2	<p>After I retired I had a lot more time in the day and I found it much easier to learn during the day, which is why I took up the French. And it keeps your brain active, you can always learn something. And meeting a range of people from different backgrounds with similar interests to your own, in the case of astronomy, is always good.</p>	<p>Q. How learning fits into retired life – transition between work and retirement</p> <p>More time available and easier to learn during day once retired. Benefits around keeping brain active and meeting new people. Similar to 4a.3</p> <p>Why easier to learn. Is it about having more time or having fewer other things on your mind? What are the implications for those who have no choice but to balance learning and work? What are the messages around promotion of learning to adults who are retired or who are about to retire?</p>
5b.1	And our daughter she needs it to teach Spanish. And a couple of other French teachers in the same class.	<p>Q. Motivation for learning Spanish</p> <p>Teacher professional development is not a one off.</p>
5b.2	I think the piece of paper doesn't really matter in the sense that the world's not going to stop turning if I don't get it. If my daughter doesn't get it she'll have to redo it next year. She won't be able to do what they've asked her to do at work. If Laura doesn't get hers she'll have to retake it.	Q. Attitude towards qualification
5b.3	<p>I think it's both. You've got the time; you can do it when you feel like doing it, not when you have to do it. You don't have to do it in the evening or on the weekends. So time's one thing. I mean, having said that with the Spanish because my daughter feels the same, we're struggling to remember a lot of the facts. We can recognize it when we see it written down but we're kind of struggling to conjure it up out of the recesses of our minds. We shall see. But I think it is good that I've got much more time. When I'm out in the garden I can actually think about it. If you want to hold conversations in your head, you can. Whereas if you're at work all day, you can't.</p>	<p>Q. Explore concept that its easier to learn now not at work... is it about time? or about using mental energy in one place?</p> <p>Not being at work provides more time for learning</p>

5b.4	<p>I think it's very important. When I started the French classes in [the City], I did that...I retired from full time employment end of March 1999 and then I was offered part time work in the summer of 1999. And I worked then until 2003. That came actually out of the blue. But I had enrolled on the French course before I retired with a view to it being something to keep your mind going. And do something different that you're interested in. I had not had a chance to do it before.</p>	<p>Q. Role of learning in transition to retirement Seen learning as a means of keeping mind active when retired. Planned pro-actively to do this. No chance to engage in French before this because of work commitments.</p>
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Ted Not interviewed during 3 rd wave		
6a.1	<p>One reason was that I lost my job. I was working at the airport and was made redundant quite recently. The first reason why I decided to learn French was to increase my employability. I have worked in retail all my life and shorthand isn't really necessary but sometimes languages are useful.</p>	<p>Q. Motivation for learning shorthand and French Work related reason for learning – to gain a job, and skills that might be useful for future jobs. Increase employability</p>
6a.2	<p>Most of the jobs I had in retail made it impossible to do this type of course. I never had a nine to five job. My jobs were either 2 to 10 or sometimes 3 twelve hour days and then I would be off for 3 days. So if I'm doing a course some of the days might fall on days when I was working and therefore I was unable to do it and I didn't want it to be off and on. As soon as you miss one or two weeks, you come back and you are catching up all of the time. About four years ago I came to apply for a course but I couldn't do it because my job didn't allow me at that time.</p>	<p>Q. Motivation for learning shorthand and French Had previously not been able to get involved in a course even though he wanted to because of demands of shift patterns making it difficult to commit regular time to learning. Could have been involved in self-taught or distance learning. Did he not want to pursue learning in this way? If not, what does he see as being the benefits of classroom based provision rather than self taught or distance learning to be?</p>
6a.3	<p>And the final reason was in relation to shorthand I thought that one advantage for me would be that I would be able to do reporting – that would give me some sort of edge and if I went in to meetings when I was in retail – most of the time I write very short notes and I come back unable to understand what I have written and it's not as comprehensive as I would like it to be. Sometimes</p>	<p>Q. Motivation for learning shorthand and French Opening up work opportunities in journalism. Also useful if needed to go back into retail or other sectors as it would assist in taking comprehensive notes to aid understanding of meetings.</p>

	they give us handouts but it's better if you can write your own minutes down to give me a better understanding of what's gone on through the meeting.	Skills is writing things down quickly and concisely develops better understanding
6a.4	But even if I don't have to use it then at least I've had a chance to try that so that if it becomes necessary I can use it and if it doesn't become necessary then it's a skill that I've developed.	Q. Clarifying about skills development for personal and employment use Learning as a way of developing skills that may be useful in employment, but still values the skills in itself if he doesn't get to use them in the workplace. What value does he see the skill being if he does not use them?
6a.5	I've always known about adult education being here because I used to go past here to the music library so I always knew it had courses and also from leaflets. About four years ago I came to apply for a course but I couldn't do it because my job didn't allow me at that time. But my address stayed on the record here.	Q. How did you find out about the courses? Working commitments may sometimes prevent participation in college courses where timings clash.
6a.6	I chose book keeping as well because I have always thought that I would like to have my own business. But I didn't do those courses because I think they didn't have enough people to do those courses	Q. Finding out about the college Work related reason for additional learning – to start own business – but course did not go ahead. On hold
6a.7	Yes I do because one thing with business is, as it grows, you might try and export or go to France for example because I am ambitious so I might think I would take a few samples to France so if you've got the language skills then it is easier for you to communicate more effectively. And you can understand what they're saying more effectively. I think you shouldn't always expect others to be able to speak English.	Q. Would French and Shorthand contribute towards business Aid business growth and relationships Follow up ongoing interest and development around starting his own business What impact has your ambition had on your learning? What impact has the learning had on your ambition?
6a.8	Yes because I think then that they have more respect for you because I think the English have a reputation for not being able to speak other languages so if you can speak their language they will warm to you better.	Q. Business edge of speaking French (linked to point 6 above) Respect and relationships within business. Likely to make business more successful.

6a.9	Yes. But not only more employable but to increase my ability to look for a job because you can see some jobs where you know definitely you can do the job but they want language skills to attach to the job and I think the money they are prepared to pay for people with language skills is a little bit extra. So it gives you that edge so I wanted to increase my prospects of getting a higher job with more money.	Q. Exploring motivation of being more employable Benefits of being more employable in general, but also being able to apply for a wider range of jobs, having additional skills to offer employers, gaining higher paid employment, edge in employment market.
6a.10	I wouldn't know because although I'm applying for jobs, I'm not applying for jobs that have anything to do with languages and also I'm trying to get a job which...the only thing I have found is I'm trying to get a job that won't interfere with my studying.	Q. Actually helped with employability Not yet seeking to bring skills into job search. Main priority is to seek work that doesn't interfere with learning – counterproductive as would meet short terms aims but limit long term ones When does he anticipate being able to use new skills in looking for employment? Long term vs. short term
6a.11	No not really because I've already got a number of qualifications. If I could do the course without the qualifications I wouldn't mind because I know if I go for a job in retail or management...if I.....actually doing it is more important than the qualification. The qualification is extra.	Q. Importance of qualifications which he is working towards Values the knowledge and skill above the qualification because of perception that it is more important to know how to do something in the workplace than to have paper to prove it Is he right? Would employers just be happy with the skill?
6b.1	I'm still interested in the shorthand, um I mean the bookkeeping em, the only reason why I've not actually made any effort to get back in to it is that is something that I'm not learning, I don't need that skill immediately. The French I do because with a language you have to know it for a longer period to be able to speak proficient. So that one I think I need to do it but bookkeeping, for the future when I run my own business. So that I'm not really very, I'm not in a rush. It's something extra that I want to do. I'm taking my time and I'll	Q. Still interested in book=keeping Although recognises this as a skill for employment or business, this is not an immediate need. Might come in useful when starts own business in the future. Learning not only to meet needs or current employment but future career plans.

	probably go back to it, which I need so I can keep. Once I've got it I want to keep practicing it so whatever it is, 5 or 6 years I'll still have that knowledge and I won't have to go back for a refresher.	
6b.2	Ok, I think it would only be useful to me depending on what sort of thing that I do. So if I want to do something related to my job, then I think the qualification would be more useful because it gives me, it could be used either for a promotion a pay rise or you can use it to make you more versatile in the company so you become more useful to the company so I think that's when a qualification can be useful.	Q. Why might a qualification be of use to you? Qualifications in subject areas related to a learner's area if employment could be used for promotion, pay rise, move within the company. No mention of using it to get a job in the first place.
6b.3	Yes, ok, em, back to the shorthand, I think if I decided to do anything with reporting which I might in the future, then that would be, I'd have an advantage because some reports use shorthand and take notes very quickly and I think that's where ...and I think with qualifications as well you can build them and then once you have the shorthand you can decide to do something else to complement it. Like once you've got the shorthand you can do reporting because it compliments it and you can use that and it will help you out.	Q. Would these qualifications be of use? Shorthand might be if he works in reporting. But here he is talking about the value of the skill, not the qualification. There is mention of building up and on qualifications – educational progression.
6b.4	In the long run I'll be working more to do with money trades because I was working in the airports in the duty free shops, I was running the duty free shops but within the airports what happens is the duty free shops and the shops are actually owned by individual companies. They're not owned by the airport so what happens is that the individual company hires the actual place in the airport and puts the duty-free shop in. So every so often the place is re [] and [] so if you go to the airport you can see duty free but it's a different company and I, we had a piece of it but we had to [] and we lost it. When you lose it, you have a year to leave. You have one year to continue running, but what they did, I and the few others were the last to go to the job so we were made	Q. What sort of work are you looking for in the long run? Indicates where the different subjects being learned fits in (or doesn't) with current plans

	<p>redundant but there were some that had been there 12 years so they kept them because a, if they made them redundant there's a lot of money to be paid out and I think they were mostly 8 years, 10 years, and 12 years and I think the company is planning to do is once the new company takes over, they inherit the staff as well so it means they don't have to pay out redundancies because legally when you take over a shop in a company you need to take the staff. It's up to you to figure out what to do with them and you can bring your new people in but the old ones already know the routine and how do you know that the new ones will be able to run the airport.</p>	
6b.5	<p>Yeah, I'm working but it's not a job...it's not my actual job that I do. It's a job that I've taken on that can keep me going until I can get my job like a manager. So I'm working now, I did. The advantage of the job I had was I had a choice of when to work so now what I did to make it easier for me is work at night so what I do is work, come home and rest and then I can go for lessons. I still go for lessons 7-9 but that's fine because my job starts at 10. So I'm able to juggle things around and it also gave me an opportunity to interview during the day. It gave me that big advantage because if I work at night and I've got an interview, I can come back and rest just slightly go for the interview and then come back and rest before going to work that night. I've got a job that it's not interfering with my learning because it's at night and the actual job doesn't start until 11. So if I leave home at 10, I get there for 11 and then I'm starting work.</p>	<p>Q. Are you currently working? Learning and working fit around each other. These hours enable participation in learning, others might prevent it.</p>
6b.6	<p>Long term, em yes, and where I'm actually working I'm doing all of the research for the business in terms of how much I need to start and it and I know to do well because I've done a lot of research. I've looked at it from all angles and I've looked at the actual market place and everything else but it's a long</p>	<p>Q. Are you still interested in starting your own business? In the short- or long-run? Book-keeping and shorthand would be useful for this, but he does not see them as key milestones in achieving these aims.</p>

	<p>term thing. I want to do it so when I start it I feel confident running it and that's where the bookkeeping is a good thing to do no matter the situation it's just a matter of me planning it in my schedule. To put it in somehow so I can actually do it. It's something in mind. And that's why I think all this I'm doing, this bookkeeping and all this shorthand, for my business it might be useful. I know the actual bookkeeping would definitely be useful and the shorthand if I want to go meet a client or something and take notes, I don't know the shorthand might be good.</p>	
6b.7	<p>Yeah, I think it has and I also think that it helps, I know I went for one interview and they asked well what do you think in your life, what do you think you've done or that you could've done earlier but now you're doing. And I said French, if I was to learn French earlier I would have been much happier than now. And they said ok, so what are you doing that you think is good for you? And I said I was doing French and they said no the question is what haven't you done in the past and now you've regretted it but it makes you more confident. They actually asked me that question and they said it can be anything. They said you had a kid or you got married and I said to me, it was the fact that I learned French and I'm doing French now and I think that made me feel, I'm doing French and I answered a question in the interview and otherwise I would have had to think of something differently and they said to me the question we talked about asked me why of course I didn't do the French before, and I said when I lost my job before what I found was that there were so many jobs in Switzerland and other places that I was able to do but the only barrier to stop be from doing it was that I had to be bilingual, I had to know French and English. And I actually know people who got into jobs and they said it's so fantastic and so I think that is made me more confident because why</p>	<p>Q. Has the confidence gained through learning spilled into other areas of life?</p> <p>Used example of learning French in an interview to demonstrate an activity that he is doing now that could have been done earlier, and what went wrong that has built confidence.</p> <p>French also opens opportunities for jobs elsewhere that require language skills.</p>

	I'm doing it is going to have a benefit in the end.	
6b.8	Yeah it did because what happened was at least I felt like I was doing something. It supported me by making me feel that while I'm not actually working there's some sort of activity and I didn't feel that I was just bored and sat there and did nothing. It's like it filled a gap that had sort of come into my life. And also there are certain things that I wanted to do that I couldn't do and because of my work situation and this made me fill that gap and that's what it did, it filled that gap.	Q. Did learning support the transition between work and unemployment? Keeping him active during phase of being unemployed. Wasn't bored or inactive. Filled a gap in his life. Gave him something to do, structure, purpose.
6b.9	For years and years I said I wanted to learn French and that's why I said now I regretted not having done it when I really felt it 5 or 6 years ago and now I would have probably spoken very good and when I fit into a job, and also I was thinking that it makes me more marketable because if I get a job now I'll still look like I was trying to get a job that wouldn't interfere with my French. I was trying to get a job, trying to fit it and then if for any reason I lose the job I know I've got something to go by. And also if I finish the job and I think that I can speak it, and I feel confident, even if I'm working the job I'll still look for another job that pays me more for the skill that I've learned. It would be just a skill that I've learned but it would be a prospect for me to move on to a different job	Q. Would language skills make a difference to job prospects? Yes. Makes him more marketable to new employers, shows his commitment to learning and development, a new skill would enable him to attain a higher salary. Ongoing prospects for new and different jobs.
6b.10	I think it's a, it's given me the confidence to do what I've wanted to do which I've always been reluctant to do so it's given me that confidence I've got with French and I've always wanted to do it but for some reason, I don't know if was lack of confidence or because lack of time, it's given me that sort of that's the big thing about it.	Q. Main benefit of learning Confidence to do the things he wants – previously been reluctant

Jo not interviewed within 2nd or 3 rd wave		
7a.1	I retired when I moved up here so it's the first opportunity I've had to do stuff during the day particularly and I'm just really enjoying it.	Q. Background about the learning taking place Moving from work into retirement
7a.2	I had moved into a City, not working, not knowing anybody, not working, not having children. It was a very useful way of interacting with people and getting to know people and I did make a friend there and we used to go out for lunch and stuff.	Q. Background about the learning taking place Benefits of learning during transition from work to retirement: getting to know and interact with people, making friends, occupation during day
7a.3	I've worked part time while the children were younger and I've always worked part time up to coming here but when they were younger I used to do night school classes and I would just do one most years, which could be anything So when I came here and I wasn't working and knew I would have spare time it was just an automatic thought process.	Q. Motivation for learning in general Long term adult learner fitting in with pressures on life such as working part time and bringing up children. Having more time during retirement and being in a new city therefore turned her thoughts to learning automatically. Sees herself as a learner, probably even when not currently engaged in learning.

Jan		
8a.1	I had to leave full-time employment about 9 years ago and at that stage computers were... they had been around for a while but they were coming more to the forefront and I never really got to grips with the beginnings of computers and thought "I've got time to get the hang of this" and it just didn't happen because I had to leave work and everybody kept on saying to me "you must get a computer of your own" and I said "oh, no, no, I'm fine, I enjoy writing and I don't need a computer" but as the years have gone on I felt myself becoming, a strange word to use perhaps, but disenfranchised, because everybody else was... I mean the computer age has moved on so quickly and I was being left behind	Q. Reasons for learning about computers Early retirement/incapacity benefit due to ill health Time she left work meant that she did not have opportunity to learn to use computers in the workplace Disenfranchised and feeling left behind by not having opportunities that could have been provided through the workplace to keep up with technology

8a.2	I'm not going back to work, so there's no point me going off and doing CLAIT or the European Computer Driving Licence	Q. Reasons for learning about computers Association of some course and qualifications with the needs of the workplace. Learners not intending to go back to work may therefore not see the relevance to their lives
8a.3	I actually live in Wigston, but some years ago, not long after I had finished work really...	Q. Finding out about the college Learning began shortly after retirement – perhaps to assist with the transition Explore value of learning in transition between work and retirement, especially as had to retire early due to ill health
8a.4	I had worked with children whose home language wasn't English and so I was thinking what are the things that she is going to find difficult and... I was having to really draw back some years ago to try and tease out how I could help her to see what she'd got to do.	Q. Unexpected benefits – helping others to learn Drawing on previous knowledge and experience from work to help support others in the class to learn. Realising existing skills and seeing the value of them in a different context.
8a.5	I can't go back to work. I'm retired on ill health grounds. Well, part time work is very... well it's there a long way in the distance and it's unlikely that it's ever going to happen as I get nearer and nearer to 60 anyway. I think it's important for people like me who keep on hearing that incapacity benefit is going to disappear to think that well we know that we can't go back to work, somehow we've got to enjoy our lives without having that “you've got to get back to work” thought and you want to do something that's going to enhance your life as well. I mean I'm still an intelligent, reasoning being. It's not as though I want to just lie in bed all day – that's not what it's about for me. I want to do something that I can achieve something, but know at the end that it's really for my achievement and yet I can use what skills I've acquired in my everyday life. But I'm not interested in – this sounds awful doesn't it – being part of the economic and profit making part of the country. In a way, it	Q. Progression Retired from full time work on ill health. May (probably not) consider part-time work in the future but it's not realistic at the moment and as she approaches 60 sees that as being increasingly unlikely. Role of learning in helping people enjoy and enhance their lives while on incapacity benefit. Does not wish to see learning as a strategy for getting her back into work. Prefers to see it as adding to her quality of life keeping her active and achieving. Acquired skills can be used in wider life and should not have to be related to the workplace. No real interest in working again – considers that having worked and contributed for most of her life, she 'deserves' not to have to

	<p>was unfortunate that I had to finish work because I was so ill, but I've worked solidly all my life. It's not sour grapes. I can't quite explain how it feels when you are reasonably fit, but not fit enough to return to work, but you want to do something and to have more skills, but you don't want the governments carrot of getting you back to work being hung in front of you. I think there must be other people in my position.</p>	<p>be pushed back into the workplace. Feels pressure of being relatively not fit, but not feeling fit enough to return to work. If the government removed incapacity benefit from her would she feel able to return to some sort of work? If so, would learning have helped in terms of skill, maintaining relationships, building confidence? Still relatively young. What role does she learning playing as she approaches and gets beyond retirement age?</p>
8a.6	<p>You know, I am reasonably intelligent and I taught all my life. Obviously I went through a stage where to have to learn anything else would have been beyond me because I wasn't in a fit state. But once you've sort of got yourself back to a reasonable level of health you don't want to vegetate. You want the challenge of learning something new and that's the motivation that drives you to do something like this.</p>	<p>Q. Progression; following up previous discussion on incapacity benefit, returning to work and the role of learning When she initially retired on ill health she would have been unable to learn immediately because of such poor health. Once a reasonable state of health had returned, learning provided a challenge and drive to her life. At what point did she feel able to return to learning? What is the role of learning in improving health? Does their need to be a minimum standard of health though to engage in the first place?</p>
8b.1	<p>I was [] when I finished work but that last thing I wanted to do was learn anything. I mean my position was different, I mean a lot of people prepare for retirement but I couldn't. it just kind of happened and quite unexpectedly and out of the blue. So I had no time to prepare myself. My first task was to improve my health. Now once I was sort of back on an even keel, I mean ok, my health's not brilliant but ok, I could function quite adequately. And because I had always enjoyed learning and teaching situations and because I always felt it was important to keep my brain as possible. Then I began to</p>	<p>Q. Role of learning in transition from work Did not want to engage in learning at all when first retired from work. No preparation time to think about what retirement might involve. Once health sorted then learning has a role to play in keeping brain active.</p>

	think about what I could do that would be of use, not just for, yes it was something that I thought yes I would like to do for my personal fulfilment	
8b.2	And also I have offered to volunteer...well made enquires, it's not definite yet about volunteering at the records office in [] because that's something that fascinates me and always has. And they need volunteers and I thought well I've got skills from my previous study that could be of use to them but I shall continue to learn because I shall find things out while I'm there and that is learning in a another way.	Q. Following on from above Volunteering-unpaid work. Learning has given her skills that she can put to use in an unpaid role. This role will also lead to further learning.
8b.3	Um...I think in the work situation you're constantly learning and having to take new initiative...well I was anyway. Having to take new initiatives on board and faced with change all the time. And the race at which to have to solve things and produce documents and analyze and assess children and there's a lot and you find that you don't...I've found that I don't work at that sort of speed any longer. Um...there's a good side and a bad side to it I suppose. Life's far more relaxed and you can do a bit more of what you want when you want how you want. But now if I have to sit down and analyze anything or pick up the main things of something that I've been given to read through and I just want to make quick notes, I find it a lot harder. Because I'm not doing it all the time. And uh, the brain cells are getting a bit, not quite as sharp as they used to be. So um, I've never thought about it in that this provides some of the structure um, it's good to have the social contacts. I miss the, I miss the staff room. I miss working with the children. But then if you've got other activities that you're doing, you've got another group of people that you can become involved with.	Q. Learning substituting for benefits gained through the workplace Working (at least in her occupation) leads to constant learning and display of initiative. Now not working life is more relaxed, making it harder to operate at the level at which she once did. Misses the social contacts from work, although have developed other contacts through other activities.
8b.4	You do. I say you, I mean I do. Sometimes I find myself thinking you mustn't be critical. You know, not that I would every say anything to	Q. Does being a teacher affect how she views her own learning experience?

	<p>anybody. You know inside if something's not going well then I tend to sort of analyze what happened and I think I could put that right it...you know? And that may be because I've been involved with having so many lessons over the years and being involved with working with probationary teachers and other teachers who are needing some help. And also every time I was faced with new students, with students from the university and the college, so I've been so involved in analyzing what's happened that I think it's part of my...it's what I think automatically. And um, I'm [] on one occasion when something was not going at all well and I had realized why I thought, well if that was me it needed to be done this way. And at the end of that particular session the tutor said the reason this has gone wrong is because and they knew they had made a mistake in the way they had presented and had been working on how they could have done it differently but I was quite relieved they had sort of come to that realization themselves that things are not right. So yeah, it does. Um, and also you think about I sometimes think those are the sort of questions that somebody or other...if somebody in the group asks a question I think ahhh why weren't they listening that's the sort of question that so and so used to ask me when we were in the classroom. When you've explained everything in letters with one syllable and somebody asks you some question about what you've just said and ahh, here we go again.</p>	
8b.5	<p>I'm sure Di doesn't know I'm a teacher. Um, the first tutor did because we had actually taught together. Only for briefly. He came in as a [] teacher for a term but he could remember because we had classrooms next-door to each other and we'd seen each other in between on various educational functions. And although I hadn't seen him in quite a number of years, it was a surprise to us both to find that we were...that was fine, it worked very well.</p>	<p>Q. Does the tutor and other learners know she is a teacher? Has she told anyone? Is it evident?</p>

8b.6	Um...as a teacher I was confident, yeah. That's not bragging or anything like that because I was sure of what I was doing. But I'm not confident when I'm faced with new situations.	Q. About confidence – didn't you need to be quite confident to be a teacher anyway?
8c.1	I had always wanted to work at [the county] records office and so I contacted them and said could I start as a volunteer. Which is what I did in January/February of 2006. I started then as a volunteer. It was just half a day a week to start off with and I continued doing that....	Q. What has happened since the last interview?
8c.2	Not at the moment. Except (pause) Not actually on the computer, but because I'm indexing things, this is for the computer. It will go on the Internet so that everyone has access to the information, the things that they've got. They all have to be numbered, but I've got to have some way of putting down what the numbers meant. Because I was used to computers I was thinking in columns, and what information you needed to put in each column and how you can classify things to make it easy for people to search. The work that I started doing, which is classifying old building plans, they gave me a proforma to start off with because they're putting all of their work onto computer. They've got staff there who can do that part but they need someone who'll do the research and indexing part for them. You know the hands on stuff like I'm doing to give to the people who are more computer literate than I am. But it makes you think in a certain way.	Q. Do you use your computer skills in the records office
8c.3	I can understand why, when they say they want things in columns. I can understand why that has to be done.	Q. So using skills gained from learning about computers
8c.4	I've always wanted to work in the records office and I think if I hadn't gone into teaching I think I probably would have ended up, probably in the museum service. That would have been a possibility for me. I've always been fascinated by old manuscripts. (Goes on to talk about how she found out	Q. Was the learning a trigger for the volunteering? No – long term aim assisted by circumstances

	about volunteering and came to take it up)		
8c.5	I needed to do the computer skills first. Not to go and work in the records office, but because I needed that for my own self esteem, to feel that I wasn't being left behind by everybody. Because everyone talks in computer terms and I thought I'm really going to have to crack this. Because I was a carer I only had a limited amount of time. So for me the priority was to actually go and get the computer training.... In fact really it's the right way round because it's made me more able to appreciate the sort of things I'm having to do at the records office.	Q. Following on from above	
8c.6	I don't think I can go back to the college because unless I go somewhere else. The problem is that everything is geared to certificates for this, that and the other for people going to work, particularly at the college.	Q. Do you anticipate going back to the college to learn anything more about computers? She concludes that she will learn from others informally rather than going to a college as appropriate courses are not available.	
8c.7	I want to share what I know as well. I think that's the teacher side of me coming out.	Q. Role of learning in her life as a retired person	
8c.1	And also, I think this is something that's happened since I retired. Because I'd done school – gap years were unheard of, unless you went off and did something like Voluntary Service Overseas – but everybody else went from school, through the sixth form, into college/university and straight into the world of work. And it was expected of you that you would stay in that job until you retired. And you realise once you've finished work, however devastating that might be and how things change, that really that was very narrow. Particularly for someone like me who went from school, to college and back into school. You knew nothing really apart from the world of education, apart from the odd holiday job that I was allowed to do working for the Gas Board. I'd never been allowed to have a Saturday job or anything	Q. Main benefit of learning	

	like that so I really didn't know anything about the world of work. So my horizons were a bit limited. Well, you know. I wish sometimes that I could turn the clock back and do gap years and just have a sort of completely broader education than I had. I was very sort of narrow. So I suppose I am making up for lost time.	
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Mick Not interviewed during 3 rd wave		
9a.1	I've got this fairytale in my head that I'd quite like to live in Greece and work somewhere in Greece and learning Greek would be a massive help, but I'm not sure... or even to work with Greeks in this country in some capacity. I don't know, an interpreter or... I'd quite like to do something like that	<p>Q. What do you see yourself using your Greek for?</p> <p>Long term dream of working in Greece or working with Greeks in the UK. Hard to tell how realistic he sees this as being and whether it is a goal or a pipedream</p> <p>How is this dream affected as he develops his Greek? Does he get more excited about the possibility of using it for work, or does he become aware that he probably won't end of using it in this way.</p>
9a.2	Because its only an hour and a half... I've not had much time to practice as I've said, which is my fault really because it's all about time management isn't it? But if I've got stuff to do for work that's obviously got to take priority. So I'd like a bit more time, but there's been nothing negative.	<p>Q. How learning fits in with work and responsibilities of being a teacher</p> <p>Class time does not have a huge impact. However does not feel he has spent enough time practising. Work takes priority over learning – may be addressed with better time management</p> <p>How does being a teacher impact view of teaching in the class?</p>
9b.1	I'd like to but I don't know if it would.	<p>Q Do you see learning Greek as translating back into work?</p> <p>Broadly aspirational but not main aim and no clear idea about how this might take place</p>
9b.2	Yeah, kind of maybe one of those. Part dreams. It's not really even that, it's just something that I wouldn't mind going in that direction, but I've not set	<p>Q. Exploring comment from initial interview about working in Greece. Is this something concrete being worked towards or just</p>

	my heart on it.	one of those things? Dream rather than particular ambition. No effort being put it to take career in that direction. Perhaps we would pick it up if we interviewed him in 10 years time. You can never tell whether these thing would be a trigger in later years.
9b.3	Yeah, because of work and family and, I suppose I could do it, I could make time but [] is more important.	Q. exploring how far work is factor in not having time to practice? We could all do more, but ultimately have to prioritise commitments. Learning can not always be prioritised against life's other activities.

Alison		
10a.1	Basically, while I was working, before I become ill, I worked in financial services – numbers, facts, figures, reports, presentations, the works. And I’m actually quite a creative person, I’m quite an ideas person and that side of my personality was quashed for 7 years and it was... I wanted to explore that side of my personality again in some way, and when I started doing the singing that’s what really opened up that side, the performance creative side and I thought well I’d like to find some form or artwork that I can do	Q. Motivation for doing pottery Enabled her to use and explore other side of her personality that was not being used (been quashed) in working environment. Learning opened up this side of her personality. Our work does not always allow us to use our skills, talents and interests fully. Learning activity may therefore provide opportunity to do this, without us having to change jobs. Did the poor fit of job to personality contribute to the health problems in the first place? Is learning and using this side of her personality therefore a strategy for recovery?

10a.2	<p>Because like I say, I don't work because of my health, which means I don't see many people. I spend a lot of my time at home on my own, not able to get out. And it can be very frustrating and very isolating. This is a good way of meeting new people. Obviously when you work you see people all the time. They might not necessarily be your friends but you have human contact, interaction, and that's something I really miss and I thought this was a good way to do it, to meet people, just to see people and talk to people on a regular basis. That was the main driver and motivation for me.</p>	<p>Q. Motivation for learning in general In the absence of work, learning can provide way of meeting people, overcoming isolation, providing structure to day. Is this similar for retirement?</p>
10a.3	<p>And the pottery, I've filled that little niche, that need that I have to create something. Because that's something when you don't work, you sort of look at your life and well think what is my role, what is my purpose, what am I doing with my life, what am I creating. When you work, you can stand back and sort of say at the end of the day "well I've finished that report, I did that project, I helped that person". When you don't work, you look at your day and think well what have I done with it. I've done nothing and doing something like pottery which is a creative process... At the end of the day you look at it and say I made that, and I think you need to have something like that were you can actually sit back and say "well I've done something". I think that everybody needs that for themselves and for me pottery fills that need.</p>	<p>Q. Benefits of learning Learning provides outlet for creativity, purpose, role in life, sense of achievement that might otherwise be achieved through work. Is this similar for retirement?</p>
10a.4	<p>I made a house number plate and my mom wants one for her house. Just things like that. Cheap gifts, which is a good thing on a limited budget, when you don't work.</p>	<p>Q. Use made of practical skills Using skills to make products for herself and others. Potential source of income but currently a way of minimising spending or displacing spending on gifts at times such as Christmas. Important as on limited income. Does she envisage that this will develop over time to a potential source of income?</p>

10a.5	Financially, I mean I get a reduced fee but its about £20 which is an awful lot for me given that I've only got incapacity benefit coming in, especially when you are doing two courses. That's £40 at the same time, so that's quite a lot.	Q. Negative impact of learning Financial impact even though she pays concessionary fees. Fees require a substantial proportion of the benefit she receives. What is the impact on what else she spends her money on of coming to these courses?
10a.6		After the tape was turned off, Christine mentioned that if her health improved the social interaction at the college would prepare her to go back to work. Pursue this issue further in next interview
10b.1	Yes. Even if it's just a way of paying for my hobby even if I just sell enough to cover the cost of my kiln firings that would be nice. But because of health issues I couldn't sit there and churn out pot after pot. What I could do is get to the stage where I was producing artistic pieces which would sell for £x because they are art rather than just a bowl. It's a different thing because pottery can be very functional but it can also be art and I think that's more where I want to go because pots are so cheap. Art is something that's individual and I think that's the direction that's drawing me.	Q. Could the pottery be a source of income generation? Not primary motivation but could pay for her to continue her hobby and cover costs. She doesn't have the physical strength to mass produce but is interested in artistic pieces that might draw a greater price.
10b.2	Now eventually my long-term goal is to get back into some kind of employment. I'm not ever expecting any time soon to be back into full time employment, but I'd at least like to be doing a few hours a week. So for me, signing up for 4-5 hours a week on a basis where I can then learn how to manage doing those hours and saying well I'm going to do those, I'm going to really try hard to do those, I'm going to learn how to pace myself.	Q. Could learning be a strategy for helping people get back to work? Longer term aim for Christine, starting small with a few hours per week Also see transition and health for more detail on Christine's story.
10c.1	The certificate was just for me. It was never going to be used to go on and use it in employment. It was never going to be used in to go on and do a degree. Therefore	Q. What has happened over previous 18 months – City and Guilds course

	there was no need for me to feel the pressure to get the certificate.	In context of declining health, started but then dropped out of course
10c.2	<p>Whenever I saw people the first questions was always “how are you? How are you doing at the moment?” because you ask. The second question was “how is your coursework coming? What have you made recently?” And that was really nice. And also to have friends commenting on my work, and sort of saying “O I really like that” or “can I have one of those?” you know. That’s always nice because it’s something tangible that I have created. Whereas when you can’t work.. A lot of people’s self worth is wrapped up in their work, because it’s what they do, it’s what they produce, it’s something tangible that you can say “I do this and I am good at it”. Whatever it I, whether its “I’m a damn good cleaner” or “I’m a fantastic brain surgeon”. It’s who you are, and when you don’t have a job, a role. I mean I can’t even say I’m a fantastic housewife because I can’t do that. And it’s like, I can’t be the best at something that I can do. Having a hobby, a learning situation and being able to say “I’m a potter”. I’m not a professional potter, I’m not somebody who sells things, I make things for myself and my friends and my family, but its something that I am producing, that I can say “I’m really proud of that. I really like that. You could buy that in a shop.” And that’s something I made, something I did, something I produced and created, and that really helps you to have worth. And it’s something that I’ve always tried to do, even before I started to go to college. When I was first ill, with that thing (needlework frame), because when I was first ill I thought I would be going back to work. And it was like, even if I’m lying on the sofa watching telly, then at least I’m sewing something. I have something produced, something tangible that you can point at and say “I did that”, because it’s really important, I think to have something that’s part of your identity, part of something you can show. I’m not just an ill person. I have more to me than</p>	<p>Q. Impact of learning on existing relationships</p> <p>Learning helping shape identity when no longer at work.</p>

	that.	
10c.3	<p>No. I haven't got the output, haven't got the volume to feel that I can sell stuff. There is a kind of gallery/shop in my home town, where.... It's a kind of co-operative where artists can sell their products and the shop just takes a slice off the top. They don't shell anything out, they just put it in there and you get a certain proportion of the money back and they take the rest of it. So its risk free for them and you get a venue in which to display your work even if you've only got a couple of pieces, and I was definitely thinking about doing that as a next step after I'd finished my City and Guilds, and then it got to the point where... Especially with throwing, because the output's quite high with throwing. You can throw 4 or 5 pots in an hour and then spend another hour fixing them up and then another hour glazing. You've got six pots and it's taken you three hours, and you can probably sell them for about £40 each, so it's worth doing. Whereas hand building you'd have to sell it for a heck of a lot to cover the amount of time it takes to build something. So while I haven't sold anything, I've done things for people who have asked for them. (Pause) But I was getting to the stage where I felt "Yeah it's getting to the stage now where I'll be happy selling stuff". And its all ground to a halt until I get can get started again.</p>	Q. Have you ever sold any of your pottery?
10c.4	<p>That is what I'd like to do. I'd like for my hobby to pay for itself.</p>	Following on from above after a reflective pause
10c.5	<p>In a dream world, yeah. That is something that I would always love to be able to do. Is that if I ever felt that I was getting sufficiently good enough, and was starting to make money off the things I was producing, then yes I would like to be able to buy a kiln and make my stuff at home as and when I was able to around my health I'd be able to sell it. That would be brilliant. I would love to be able to do that. That would be an absolutely dream situation. It would be like working... It's</p>	Q. Do you see it as getting beyond just a hobby that pays for itself? i.e. transition to part time working in a new career

	the only way I could work part time because my health never follows a pattern (gives example). It would be very, very difficult for me to get any kind of part time work, even if I felt that my health had improved to the stage where I was there would be 10 hours a week where I could probably work. It's very very difficult to get a job where you just come in when you feel well enough. Employers don't like it for some reason (humorously). So doing something like that, at home, part time would be ideal. But you know, it's a few years away. But it's definitely something that is in the back of my head.	
Naomi Not interviewed during 3 rd wave		
11a.1	I work full-time and then I come home and have to put everything out. Its just getting the time to sit down and just read through my books. I do try. The only thing is I need to build the time up so that I can do...	Q. Balancing work and study (L) Working full time restricts time available to practice outside of classroom
11a.2	Say if it started from GCSE and went up to A-level, and then I'd probably do something in, like probably go to further education to get a degree or something, and then I'd be able to switch my career into something like that, you know. I'm looking for a career change as well, so that's why.	Q. Reason for wanting a qualification for the course Educational progression as a route to changing career. Motivation for learning was not to get a new job, but having begun learning, it is possible that opening up of new opportunities might be an unexpected benefit. Widened horizons Difficult to tell how much this is just an idea or whether it is becoming a goal. Pursue how realistic she sees this as being and the steps she anticipates taking over what period of time to get there.
11b.1	That's what most employers ask for. Having 5 GCSE graded C and above. Although I've already got a permanent job anyway, if I do decide to leave I've got the 5 GCSEs.	Q. Gaining a GCSE would bring Leanne's total up to 5. Why is this important? Previous answer indicates that she sees it as demonstrating that she is willing to learn – a skill that employers may perceive as being valuable. Strengthens her position if she decided to look for another job.

		Qualifications as a passport to new employment. A benefit to her by meeting employer requirements.
11b.2	Yeah, yeah. It may not be in a relevant subject, but it's still 5 GCSEs.	From above.... Q. does it makes you more employable and give you more options? Perceives that it's the volume of qualifications that are important to employers rather than the knowledge or skill derived from the particular learning in the subject areas.
11b.3	It's something I want to do and hopefully it'll get me higher in my job anyway. So I can go on to do business support instead of just monetary support.	Q. about other learning in which she is also engaged that she is doing at her employer's request. Is it something that you want to do or have to do? Beyond her Greek she is motivated to learn in order to develop her working life. She is ambitious and perhaps this is why she can see the employment value of Greek
11b.4	Well, it all depends on how I get on with the GCSEs. The field of work that I'm in, I don't really want to be doing it 10 years down the line. Maybe doing it on my own, but right now that's just sort of a dream.	Q. are you interested in staying in the same field of work or doing something different? Although no immediate plans to move she doesn't want to see herself still there in 10 years. Dream stage rather than concrete plans.
11b.5	Ok, everyone supports me at work and they all know that I'll do it. It's alright, quite good. It gives me a break and helps me finish out the week. With a partner it gets me to do my stuff while he does his stuff.	Q. work-life balance Has support from colleagues at work, partner and family. Learning provides a break in the working week and helps her to keep going well until the end of the week.
11b.6	Yeah, um I've had a lot of stuff going on in the past couple of weeks so it's been really minimal, but I do during the weekends and maybe one night a week I do my homework and revise. I do try.	Linked to the above... Q is there enough time to practice? Tries to do this in evenings and weekends. Time is naturally limited due to work commitments.
11b.7	Um, not really because I'm really office based and um...	Q. Has the course has an impact on work? No. Although answer perhaps reflects a narrow view of what

	learning might do for her at work.
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Anne Not interviewed during 3 rd wave	
12a.1	<p>I think we shall know the alphabet and that would be great and I'm a little bit more slower... 'Cause I work shift work anyway and its hard for me to sit at home at the weekend, 'cause I work weekends as well, so therefore the only time I can take it and do it is on my night shift, but on the night shift you are too tired to sit there and you know. But it is a good course actually.</p> <p>I'm hoping to get a job out there hopefully, just part time. And 'cause I work in nursing, its convenient for me to get a job in one of the hospitals and translate...</p>
12a.2	<p>Q. Initial expectations of course Limited in progress by working situation – patterns of shift work make it difficult to find time to practice outside of classroom. This related to hours of work and tiredness when not at work because of shift patterns</p> <p>Q. to Leanne about whether the learning would help in her career Greek language will help to get part-time nursing job in Greece How strong a factor was the work element in deciding to do Greek? Does she feel that she will be sufficiently competent in the language to work there?</p> <p>Q. How does learning fit into work? Night shifts sometimes provide opportunities to do some work, although its difficult to concentrate at work and there are often interruptions. Shift work means that she is tired and has to be very motivated to make herself go to the class.</p> <p>Q. Is she still thinking about getting part time work in Greece? Sees it as being a possibility so would be able to put her</p>
12b.1	<p>Oh, sometimes because you work such funny hours and shifts. Sometimes, like, if I'm on night shift I take my work with me but then after looking after so many patients, it's hard to concentrate when you know you've got to go in and get up and look after patients [] but you know you've got to get up and look after them so it can interrupt and sometimes like when I've gotten home, I'm so tired I really, really can't be bothered to go. But I do go, I make myself go. So []</p>
12b.2	<p>Um, yeah I'd like to try and get some sort of work there. Like I've said, I've got friends that live over there anyway and they managed quite well, so...</p>

		language skills to use here.
12b.3	Uh, one of our friend he couldn't speak a word of about four year, five years ago but when we saw him last year, he can communicate pretty well because he lives there and he's picking the words up all the time. He's probably not fluent in Greek but, you know, he gets by.	Q. Do her friends in Greece who work speak much Greek? Not fluent but can communicate pretty well. No indication that strong Greek skills are needed to work, perhaps because working among ex-pat population.
12b.4	Yeah, yeah, you've really got to have some sort of [] because that's the biggest problem when people go and live abroad, the language barrier. So, yeah, it will.	Q. How much Greek would be needed to do her current job in Greece? Some because the language barrier is problematic
12b.5	Maybe in a year's time. I'm not really a hundred percent in, you know, I mean I could ask you the odd thing. Things like, you know, hello, goodbye, how are you and this []. You know, the basic ones, but um yeah. I think in about a year's time I will definitely get...	Linked to above: Q. Is her Greek at a sufficient level for this yet? Only basic competence now but expects to have enough language in a year's time.

Bernard Not interviewed during 2 nd or 3 rd wave		
13a.1	I was a little tentative at first because I wasn't sure how fast I would be going able to do it, but I did pick it up fairly quickly. To me it goes to show partly that if you are in a full-time job you can get, its much harder to do these sorts of courses if you are in a full-time job because your mind is so cluttered up with whatever you do during the day. It's far more difficult to get to grips with the language, with something as complicated as grammar in the evenings, but without a full-time job my mind is much fresher, so I was able to make more progress.	Q. Initial expectations of his learning? Found it much easier to learn now retired than he did when working full-time. Mind is more fresh and clear as it is not 'cluttered' with work. Faster progression when not working. When asked, he also confirmed that having more time to put into learning also contributed to better learning now retired. Linked to point 2 below.
13a.2	You have more time. In the 1970s, I remember I did... when I was... I did try some Italian, at that time but I was working full-time, and I found that even though I was but a callow and innocent youth then, I found that	Q. Follow up from previous comment to ask about effect of having additional time to learn Although we assume that it is easier to learn when young, because

	<p>I was too mentally tired to do a lot of evening work after a full days work, especially mental energy expended on top of mental energy. But when you haven't got that, when you are only investing mentally on a single occasion then it's easier. So when I first started Italian I was pleased that I was able to make much more progress than I had 20 years ago when I started something similar.</p>	<p>he was working full time he did not have the mental energy to do a lot of study in the evening after a day at work. One mental activity per day is easier.</p> <p>This is in contrast to learner 1 where learning is a positive distraction from the mental energy expended at work and leaves her revitalised rather than drained further. Does it depend upon the job that you do, the person you are, the type of learning you do.? Do both things happen at once?</p>
13a.3	<p>Only over the last 2 or 3 years. Where I think the absence of a full-time job means that I have made a bit more progress.</p>	<p>Q. Have you been retired throughout the duration of this learning?</p>
13a.4	<p>And I know in the evening I had to chair a meeting and suddenly I felt... If you are chairing a meeting there are one or two little anxieties, but I certainly went off to this meeting feeling "wow, if I can sort the [Italian phrase] and am going to commit to and use some of that grammar effectively, this group of reprobates at a meeting won't stand a chance". So its also gives you practice, 'cause another thing, it keeps you practiced in speaking to a group. There is the benefits of group contact and group presentation. So I think they are quite... for me I have found some cross over, some cross references that are quite useful.</p>	<p>Q. Impact of learning on other activities</p> <p>Skills and motivation developed are having an impact on voluntary activity. These skills could equally be valuable in the workplace. It could still be classed as economic impact if we consider the voluntary workforce as contributing to this.</p> <p>Benefit in terms of improvement in communication skills and group management</p>

Brian Not interviewed during 2 nd or 3 rd wave		
14a.1	<p>It would be nice to have. I don't think its necessary because we are not actually learning it to... further our career.</p>	<p>Q. Value of qualification</p> <p>Associates qualifications with supporting career progression therefore does not see it as being necessary for him or his wife who have other motives for learning Mandarin associated with personal development.</p>

